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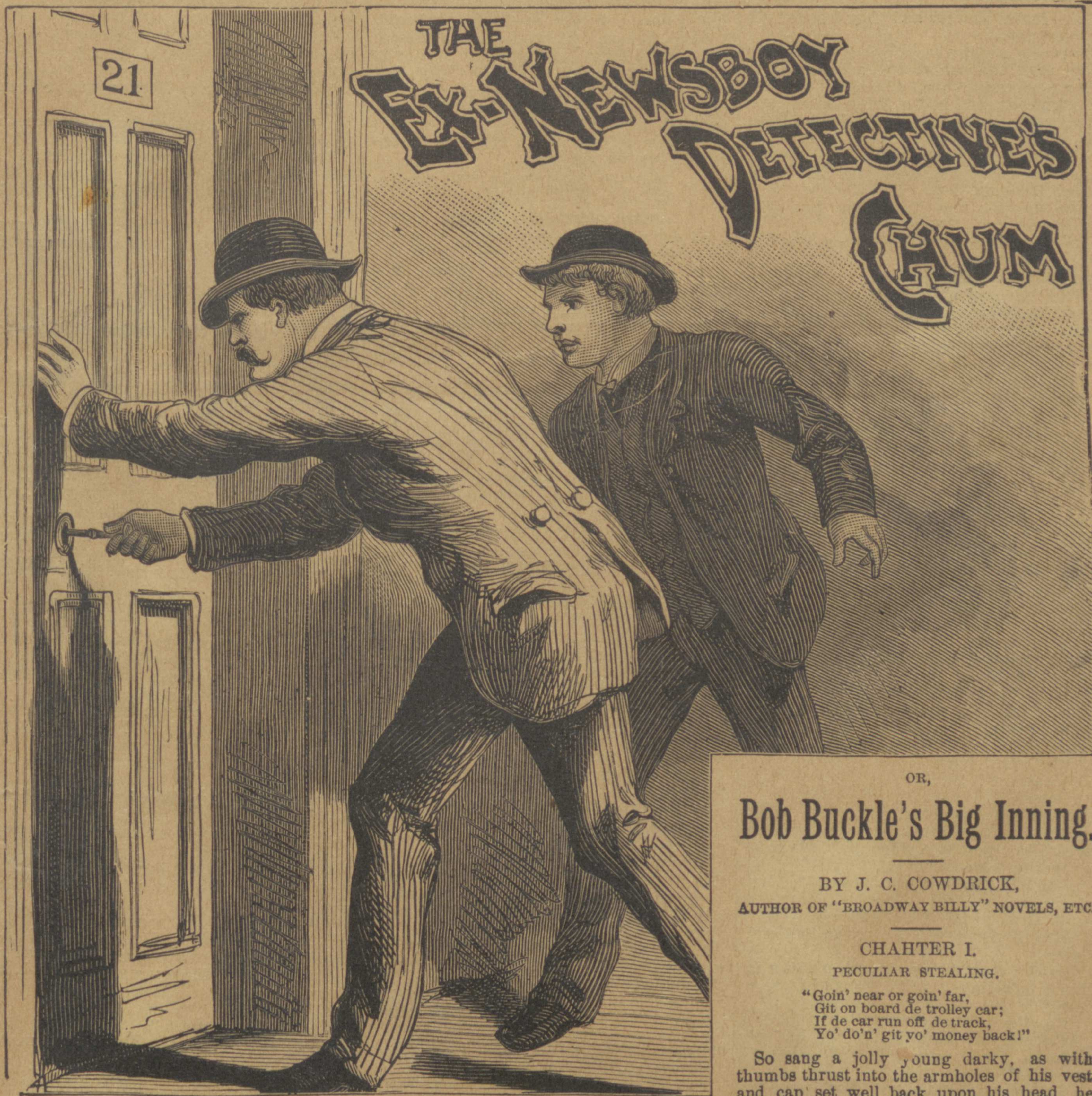
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THE YOUNG DETECTIVE STOOD ON HIS RIGHT EAGER TO GET A SIGHT OF
THE ROOM AS SOON AS THE DOOR OPENED.

OR,

Bob Buckle's Big Inning.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.
PECULIAR STEALING.

"Goin' near or goin' far,
Git on board de trolley car;
If de car run off de track,
Yo' do'n' git yo' money back!"

So sang a jolly young ducky, as with
thumbs thrust into the armholes of his vest
and cap set well back upon his head, he
sauntered up Fulton Street, and his voice
was full of melody.

He was about fifteen years of age, as black as coal and as shiny as a coat of varnish, almost, and he was as fat as a coon and as keen-looking as a Virginia 'possum. Added to that, he was good-looking as darkies go, and altogether a fine specimen of his race.

"When yo' git upon d'e car,
Tell d'e 'ductor who yo' are;
If he asks yo' —"

He broke off suddenly, his good-natured face expanded with a smile, as he exclaimed:

"Hello, Bob! d'at you? Anybody would think yo' was goin' fo' d'e doctor, d'e way yo' am pacin' it off. Can't yo' stop long 'nuff to ketch yo' breff and tell a feller what's up?"

"Hello, Glossy! is it you?" exclaimed the other, coming to a stop and putting out his hand. "Thought I heard your warble, and was looking around to find you. Yes, I am in a hurry, but not goin' for a doctor; wheel about and come along."

The darky obeyed, and they hurried off in company.

Bob was a white boy, two or three years older than the darky, and a head taller. He was of good build, with fine muscular development, and had a frank, intelligent face, with regular features and keen eyes. He was well clad, and looked to be every inch a young gentleman. His correct name was Bob Buckle, but was familiarly called Business Bob.

The darky's was Pete Rice, but was better known as Glossy Pete.

Bob Buckle had formerly been a newsboy, as Pete still was, and the two lads had been, to a degree, chums.

Bob, bustling and active, and full of business every minute, had come to be called Business Bob, as said. For this he had attracted the notice of a private detective.

This detective, Joe Phillips by name, widely known in Brooklyn, gave Bob some work to do in his line, and was so well pleased with the result that he employed him permanently to act as office boy and to assist in detective work where a boy could be of service.

In accepting the new position Bob had transferred to Pete every possible "good will and interest" of the business he was leaving, which had materially helped his colored chum along in the world; so much so, that Pete expected to stock up and open a stand upon a busy corner in the near future, having saved enough money for the purpose.

"What is all your rush about, d'en?" queried the darky.

"Why, we have got a curious case on hand as tall as a steeple, and I am going to get the boss."

"Ho! d'at am d'e fack, hey?"

"That's it, Glossy."

"What am it like?"

"Guess."

"What's d'e use ob d'at?"

"Well, no use, that's so; you couldn't guess it in a month of Sundays. We have got to find a stolen corpse."

"Whew!" whistled the darky. "What fo' d'e lan' ob Goshun anybody want to go an' steal a stiff fo', Bob?"

"That is what we have got to find out, Glossy."

"Nebber hear'n' tell ob sech a thing in all my bo'n days. Ain't yo' givin' me a stear?"

"No; I'm in dead earnest."

"Tell me all 'bout it, fo' d'e lub' ob goodness, 'fore I turn pale from press ob curiosity."

"Turn pale; ha, ha, ha! Nothing short of a coat of whitewash would ever turn you pale, Glossy. Why, chalk wouldn't make a brown mark on you. But, I'll tell you, of course."

"Go 'head, d'en, quick."

"A woman came tearing into the office a while ago, crying and wringing her hands, and asked for Mr. Phillips. I told her he was out, and she went on so that I told her I would dodge out and hunt him up, if possible; and I asked her what was the matter."

"An' d'at was what she told yo'?"

"You let me tell it, my midnight-complexioned friend, if you please," said Bob. "She said that her daughter had died, and the body had been laid out in the parlor on a table. The funeral was to take place to-morrow, but some time in the night the body was taken, in some mysterious manner, and it looks as if there would be no funeral."

"Well, d'at beats d'e mischief, d'at do!"

"Yes, I should say so, Glossy; but I bet my hat Joe Phillips can solve the mystery if he gets a fair chance at it, and I will back him up for all I am worth. If necessary, we will call on you, too, to take a hand in the game, for the body of that young lady has got to be produced. I have spoken. They call me Business Bob, and I mean business this time, you bet. It was awful to see the way that poor woman went on about it."

That was the story, but the boys talked on until they had to part, when Bob continued on his way and Pete went in another direction, singing:

"When yo' git upon d'e car,
Tell d'e 'ductor who yo' are;
If he ask yo' fo' yo' fare,
Fork it over an' don't swear!"

CHAPTER II.

JOE PHILLIPS, DETECTIVE.

Business Bob found his employer where he had expected he should.

Joe Phillips was a man of method. When he said he would be at a certain place at a certain time he was generally there.

Bob, therefore, knew where to look for him, for, when possible, the detective gave the boy an outline of his programme before going out, so as to give a clew by which to find him.

"Hullo!" the detective exclaimed, as Bob entered the place. "What is wanted, Bob?"

"You are wanted, sir, and that right away," answered the apprentice, and he hurriedly explained the nature of the new case.

"Well, that is something peculiar, at any rate," the detective remarked, on hearing the story. "Do not recall that I ever heard of anything of the kind. You say she wants me to come to the house?"

"Yes; and I would give a week's pay if you would let me go with you, too. I would like to hear more about it."

"Well, come on with you, since it is nearer there than to the office."

Business Bob was highly elated at hearing this.

In due time they were at their destination, a handsome residence on one of the principal streets.

The insignia of death was seen by the side of the door, white, showing that the deceased was a person in the morning of life when the grim reaper laid his hand upon her.

A servant answered the door-call—a woman, whose pale, frightened face showed that she shared the distress of her mistress.

"Mrs. Achterson?" asked the detective.

"What name, please?"

"Joseph Phillips."

"Come right this way, sir."

She led the way down the hall, the detective and his assistant following.

The servant, opening a door, spoke the name, and stepped aside to allow the two callers to enter.

A woman was there, the one who had called at the detective's office. She was pacing the floor and wringing her hands, while tears streamed from her eyes.

"Oh, sir!" she cried, immediately; "find and restore the body of my child, or I shall go mad—mad. Who can have been so cruel as to steal it from me? And what can have been the motive? My poor Luella."

"Try and be calm, madam," spoke the detective, gently. "We must make a careful study of the matter together, to come at the truth, and nothing is to be gained by any other means. Pray sit down—pardon me, but you are too weak to stand; we will talk it over."

The woman sank upon a chair, motioning the detective to be seated himself.

"When did your daughter die?" the detective inquired.

"Yesterday, sir," was the broken response.

"Had she been sick very long?"

"She had not been sick at all, sir; it was very sudden."

"Ah! that is the case, eh? To what was her death attributed, then, I must inquire?"

"The physician said it must have been heart failure."

"Had your daughter been subject to heart trouble, then?"

"Not that I was aware of. But, sir, why these questions?"

"I can do nothing until I have gathered all the particulars."

"That is true, of course. Pardon my impatience; but you cannot know how I feel."

"I can imagine your feelings, madam, and I heartily sympathize with you in your affliction. I will do everything in my power to recover your daughter's body for you."

"Your words give me hope, sir. There is one great dread I have, that the body may have been stolen by miscreants, who have sold it to some medical institution. Oh! that thought nearly drives me wild! You do not think it is true, do you, Mr. Phillips?"

"No, madam, no; do not let that thought be entertained for a moment."

So the detective answered, whether he believed what he said or not, and it was better so.

"Why, then, was it taken?" the woman urged.

"That is for us to ascertain, madam. I must question closely into your private affairs, and, to aid me, you must give me all the information you possibly can."

"I'll answer anything you ask, sir—anything. If you can only get at the bottom of the mystery and restore my child to me. You must do that, sir! You must, you must! I have often seen your name in the papers, and I thought of you when I saw all hope—"

"Your pardon, madam, but that is of no moment. I take it for granted that you are a widow, since your husband does not appear in the matter."

A cloud came over her face at once.

"I suppose I am a widow, sir," she answered.

"How is that? Do you not know?"

"I am not certain. My husband disappeared mysteriously more than twelve years ago, and I have never heard of him since."

"His name?"

"Andrew Achterson."

"Tell me all you can about that, madam."

"There is little to tell, sir. He disappeared, and that was all."

"Do you suspect that he met with foul play? This may have an important bearing upon the present case."

"No. The police searched for him, but no trace of him was ever found."

"You have informed the police of this case."

"Yes."

"How old was your daughter at that time—the time of Mr. Achterson's disappearance?"

"She was nine years old, sir."

"And now twenty-one?"

"Very nearly, when she died."

"Your only child?"

"Yes."

"Your husband was fond of her?"

"Yes, very; and she was more like him than me—more quiet and studious."

"To direct your thoughts into another channel, was there any financial advantage to any one in your daughter's death?"

"No, not the— Ah! I had not thought of that before. Her life was insured for a large sum—ten thousand dollars—and that will come to me. In my grief I had not once thought of that, sir, believe me."

The detective pulled at his mustache and was thoughtful.

"That is a large sum on the life of so young a person, madam," he observed. "I must ask you to explain something about it. I need not remind you how a cold, cruel world will look upon the matter—your daughter's sudden death and this mysterious disappearance."

"Good Heavens! Do you imagine that I have been concerned in a scheme, in a plot that called for the death of my only child? No, no! And, supposing I had been base enough to kill her, what could I hope to gain by the disappearance of the body? Without the body, I cannot hope to recover a cent of the insurance money. But I assure you that I am innocent of every thought of that kind."

"I am willing to believe you, madam. Explain something about it, please. How came your daughter to be insured for so large an amount?"

"It was a matter of mutual benefit between her and me," was the response to that. "I desired to insure my own life for her benefit, and she would not hear of my doing that unless I allowed her to do the same for me. I considered it a waste of money, she being young and healthful, but in order to carry my point, I made it that way. That is all there is about it, sir, believe me, and, as I have told you, not a thought of the matter came to me until this hour."

CHAPTER III.

PICKING FOR PARTICULARS.

Business Bob could see that his employer was puzzled.

Bob had been with him long enough to learn something about the man, and he could tell that much easily.

The boy himself was interested in the matter, greatly interested, and listened to all that was said, and watched the speakers intently while doing so, trying to form a theory of his own.

"Have you an enemy, madam?" the detective suddenly asked.

"Why, not to my knowledge, sir. Why do you ask that?" in some surprise.

"Your daughter being dead, an enemy might desire to cheat you out of the insurance."

"And would take this means of doing it. But, sir, we have mentioned the matter to no one, and I do not know that it is known."

"If that is the case, the mystery deepens. By the way, had your daughter a lover, or lovers? Was there anything of that nature that might have bearing upon the matter?"

"Yes, she had a lover, sir, an accepted lover, and admirers many; but, how that fact can have had anything to do with this

sad matter is beyond my comprehension. The only thing I can think of is the one horrible thing I have suggested to you, sir, and that thought haunts me continually."

"It is something unheard-of, madam. You must not give any weight to that. But this lover, who is he?"

"His name is Robert Wellstone."

"Where does he reside?"

"His home is in the West, but he lives in Brooklyn now, at the — Hotel."

"Does he know of your daughter's death?"

"I have sent him word, sir."

"He has called, of course."

"No; he has not."

Bob saw that Phillips attached importance to that.

"Is not that strange, madam?"

"It begins to appear strange to me, I must admit, sir. He must have received my note last night when he returned from business."

"Where is his business?"

"In New York."

"Do you know what it is, and the place?"

These particulars were promptly given, the woman having the knowledge required.

Then followed a great many more questions and answers, which may be omitted, since they would only weary the reader and not advance the story, yet in which particulars were drawn out.

"Now, to come down to the case proper," said the detective, when he had satisfied himself along those lines. "At what hour last night did you last see the body, in the room where you have told me it was laid out preparatory for the funeral, madam?"

"About midnight, sir."

"And everything was all right at that hour?"

"Yes."

"You had no sitters-up?"

"No; that is something I have always considered folly. Would that I had employed some one to watch."

"Regrets are useless now; we have to take the matter just as it is. Did you look well to the fastenings of the house on retiring?"

"No more so than usual, save to the parlor, where the body lay. There I did examine the windows, to see that the catches were on, and on coming out I turned the key in the lock."

"The windows were then secured?"

"Yes."

"And this morning?"

"They were the same, and the door was left locked."

"And yet you tell me that the body of your daughter was missing. Here is a mystery, truly."

"But you can solve it, can you not, sir? Do not tell me that you cannot, or I shall go crazy, I know I shall! It is almost maddening!"

"I will do the best I can, madam, believe me, and it is seldom that I am baffled; others might tell you never, but I will modify that. I will do the best of which I am capable."

"Certainly you can do no more. But, sir, you will not keep me long in suspense? You will report early and often, whether you have discovered anything or not? Perhaps you can understand the yearnings of my heart, but it is hard to believe that you can realize its intensity."

"I will do that, if you desire it, madam."

"I do, I do!"

"How many servants have you, madam?"

"Only two, sir; the woman you saw, and another who is employed in the kitchen."

"And these know no more of the matter

than you do yourself, of course? Did you sleep soundly when you retired, after your visit to the parlor?"

"I scarcely seemed to sleep at all, so great was my grief, but I suppose I must have done so, toward morning. I heard no noise during the night, and suspected nothing until I made the discovery this morning."

"Nor the servants?"

"They say they heard nothing, sir."

"What was your first thought when you found the body gone?"

"Heavens! I did not think. I was paralyzed, and it was some moments before I could call out. When I did, the servants came, and our amazement knew no bounds."

"Could any one have gained admission into the house without your knowledge after you have retired, as you have said? Whose business was it to see that the front door was secured?"

"Martha's—the woman you saw. No; no one could have gained admittance. We looked to the front door immediately, and it was locked, just as she had left it. Oh! it is enough to drive me mad!—mad! I cannot stand it, sir! I cannot stand it! You must do something quickly!"

"Let us see that room, madam, if you please."

"Yes, yes; anything! Come this way, sir!"

She rose hurriedly, crossed the floor to where double doors opened into the adjoining parlors, and threw one of these open.

They followed her in, and the first thing noticeable was the table on which the dead young woman had been laid, and from which she had so mysteriously disappeared during the night.

Phillips went around the room carefully, letting nothing escape his notice, but there was nothing of importance to attract his attention. The windows were secure, and, as he remembered them from without, it would have been difficult to have removed the body that way.

When he came around to the double doors, he stopped there.

"How about these doors, madam?" he asked.

"What about them, sir? They were locked, if you mean that, with the key on this side, as you see it now."

"That is what I meant. Madam, the further I go the more mysterious this matter appears. If I am frank with you, and give you the view of a practical man of the world, pardon me."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean this: When the police have come to investigate the affair, I am very much afraid that suspicion must fall upon you."

"On me? Why, sir, that will be folly—"

She stopped, evidently seeing the force of what he had said.

"I am afraid that it will be so," he repeated. "But I can give you the assurance that I hold you innocent."

"As they all must do sir, for innocent I am. Surely they could not be so base as to think that I would kill my only child, whom I loved so well— My God! They cannot think that!"

"It remains to be seen, madam. In any event, I hold you innocent, for I have studied you well during the time I have been here. Then, as I have said, your success would have depended upon your retaining possession of the body. You would be the last one in the world to spirit it away."

"I am dazed, Mr. Phillips, bewildered. I scarcely know what you are saying to me. Pray leave me, for the present, but call again soon, as you have promised to

do. In the mean time I will make every effort to compose myself so as to be able to answer your questions more rationally. If you have nothing more to ask, pray leave me at once. I must be alone."

"Very well, madam, I respect your wishes. Come, Robert," and the detective bowed and left the room, Business Bob following him.

CHAPTER IV.

ANOTHER CASE APPEARS.

Business Bob, as soon as they were outside, could keep still no longer.

"Great Gowanus!" he exclaimed, excitedly; "what kind of a case is it, boss, anyhow?"

"That is just what I am trying to figure out, Bob," was the answer. "It is about the most curious case that ever came under my notice. I hardly know what to think about it."

"Don't you think the woman is trying to work a racket on the insurance company?"

"No."

"Then I am all at sea, sure enough. That was the only thing I could get hold of, and I thought maybe it was that. There is a nice sum of money to be had."

"Can't help it, Bob; that is not the secret this time. I studied her well while I was talking with her, and am sure she was not acting. We'll go to the office, and there I will smoke a cigar while I think hard upon the matter, and I'll be able to fix upon a theory."

So to the office they went.

The detective's office was in a fine building on a busy street.

When they entered and mounted the main staircase of the building they heard a musical voice singing:

"Go inside an' take yo' seat;
But yo' mus'n' cross yo' feet;
Sot right down an' hold yo' breff;
You be tickled 'mos to deff!"

"That's Glossy!" cried Bob. "What can he be doing here, I wonder? There must be a thousand verses to that song he sings; I have never heard the end of it yet. There he goes again!"

"When d'e car come to a curb,
Tighten up yo' eb'ry nerb;
Grit yo' teeth an' hol' hard fast,
Till d'at curb am safely pass'd!"

"Hello, Glossy! What are you doing here?" cried Bob, as he and the detective came to the door of the latter's room, where the darky was waiting.

"Waitin' fo' yous," was the response.

"What do you want?"

"I wan' yo', boss, d'ar' and in d'e mightiest hurry eber was, too."

"You want me?" asked Phillips.

"Yes."

"What for, my piece of polished charcoal?"

"You are wanted to come to d'e — Hotel, sah, jes' as soon as yo' can git d'ar'."

"How long have you been waiting here?"

"Not more'n a minute, sah."

"I thought you hadn't been here long, Glossy," observed Bob Buckle.

"What made you fink d'at? How could yo' tell whether I had been here long or short or otherwise?"

"Because we would have found you dead if you had been here very long."

"How yo' make d'at out?"

"Some one would have killed you for singing that endless song of yours."

"You min' yo' own business, Business Bob, d'at am what yo' kin do," scolded the darky. "D'at song am my own pus-s'n'l property, an' nobody else kin sing it; 'cause why, d'ey don't know it all."

"Never mind the song," interrupted the detective; "what is it that is wanted of me at the hotel, Pete?"

"Somefin' wrong in one ob d'e rooms, sah."

"What is it?"

"Don't know; guess d'ey fink de feller in room No. 21 am takin' his eberlastin' sleep."

"Then why didn't they tell the police? What do they want to bother me for? I guess there must be something more to it than you know, Glossy. Bob, I'll have to go and see what is wanted."

"Can't I go, too?" asked Bob.

"What for?"

"Well, that is the hotel where the woman said Robert Wellstone is stopping, you know, and—"

"By Jupiter! so it is. Yes, come along, if you wish to, for it is possible that I may want you on hand."

The detective did not open the door of his office, but turned and descended the stairs, the boys following him.

"Are you going with us, Glossy?" asked Bob.

"Deed I's not. I picks my company, I does. My singin' might diskumfuddle yo' finer thinkin'."

"Ha, ha! Well, it might, that is the fact, Glossy. Take care of yourself, my lily-white pard, and I'll see you later, if nothing breaks. Ta, ta!"

So they parted, on reaching the sidewalk, Bob and the detective going in one direction and the darky in the opposite, and in a moment the darky broke out into song again, like this:

"May run ober boy or man,
Keep from faintin' if yo' can;
Woman, child, or dog, or cat,
You will soon git use' to d'at!"

The detective and his assistant laughed, and hurried on their way to the hotel.

Arriving there, Phillips went at once to the clerk, whom he knew.

"What is wrong, Jones?" he asked.

"That is what we want you to find out, Joe."

"Why didn't you call in a policeman?"

"Meant to, if you hadn't got here soon. Knowing you, you were the first one I thought of."

"Well, what is it?"

"There is something wrong in room No. 21."

"So the darky said. Who is the occupant of that room?"

"A young man named Wellstone—"

"Robert Wellstone?"

"Yes; know him?"

"I have heard of him."

"A fine young fellow. A man came to see him, said he had called first at his place of business in New York, but found he wasn't there. This is the gentleman, Mr. Ambler, Mr. Phillips."

A young man approached, and the clerk introduced him.

The detective gave his hand, while his eyes met those of the young man in a momentarily steady gaze.

Ambler was twenty-eight or thirty years of age, good looking and well dressed.

He was dark complexioned, and wore a black mustache. He was spare, and apparently of nervous temperament.

"Yes, I am sure something must be wrong with Bob," he said. "They said at the office that he had sent no word, and that was taken as evidence that he must be sick or that something had happened to prevent his coming to the office. I had an appointment with him for this morning."

"At his office?"

"Yes."

"Have you tried to unlock the door?" turning to the clerk.

"Yes, but the key is in the lock on the inside. That makes it seem plain that Wellstone is inside."

"I will go up immediately. If that is

the case, there certainly must be something wrong, sure enough. Will you come along with me?" to the young man to whom he had just been introduced.

"Assuredly, sir," was the response.

The clerk called some one to take his place, and led the way up to the room in question.

Coming to door No. 21, they stopped, and the detective produced a peculiar looking tool having a handle like a large key, and inserted it into the lock, while the others watched eagerly.

Bob Buckle stood on his right, eager to get a sight of the room as soon as the door opened, the others on the left and a little further back, and it was a moment of almost breathless suspense, while the detective turned the little instrument in the lock.

Presently there was a click, and the door swung open, when a horrible sight met their expectant gaze—a sight more horrible than had been anticipated. On the floor lay the body of Robert Wellstone, with a cord around his neck, a cord that was wound around each hand several times, indicating at a glance that he had taken his own life in the most frightful manner imaginable.

CHAPTER V.

MURDER OR SUICIDE?

Ambler was the first to speak.

"Great Heavens!" he cried. "He has taken his life!"

"And in a way unheard of!" exclaimed the clerk. "I'd never 'a' thought he'd do a thing like that."

The detective had said nothing, but had advanced into the room and was looking carefully around, and had picked up a folded sheet of paper from the floor, which he read.

"What have you there?" asked Ambler.

"A note which the poor fellow evidently received last night," was the answer.

"Is it anything that can throw light upon his reason for taking his life in this horrible manner, Mr. Phillips?"

"I hardly know. This is what it says:"

"Mr. Wellstone—This brings you the saddest news, which will be almost as much a blow to you as it was to me. My heart is broken, and I have nothing to live for. My child—our Luella—is dead."

"ANN ACHTERSON."

Even before the detective had finished reading George Ambler had clapped a hand to his forehead and staggered back, and now he cried:

"Luella Achtersen dead? My God! can it be possible?"

"You knew her, then?"

"Yes, yes."

"But you had not heard of her death, it is evident."

"No, no, I had not heard. Poor Bob! It was this sad news that made him do this desperate deed."

"It would seem so," remarked the detective. "These words in pencil at the bottom of the letter seem to be proof of it: 'Nor have I anything to live for,' signed 'R. W.'"

"Those words are there?"

"Certainly."

Ambler stepped up to the detective and looked, immediately adding:

"And it is poor Bob's writing. Poor fellow, it was a sad blow for him, but this is almost as sad for me."

"He was your friend, then?"

"Yes; or had been."

"Then he was not friendly to you now?"

"Well, it was nothing; a little misunderstanding. My appointment with him for this morning was to talk the matter over and make up."

"It is past making up now, that is certain."

"And yet I can hardly believe it, in spite of the fact that it is here before my very eyes," observed the clerk. "Wellstone was not the sort of fellow to do such a thing as this."

"He must have been out of his mind," said Ambler.

"Yes, he certainly must, with this thing so handy," spoke the detective.

He held up to view a revolver.

"Where was it?" asked Ambler.

"Here in this drawer."

"Then you think—"

"I am puzzled why he should choose such a painful means of death, with this thing so near to hand. A touch of the trigger, and all would have been over with him in this world."

"It is strange, truly."

"Yes, it is more than strange. Another strange thing is, that there is no pencil to be found around. Are you quite sure that this is Mr. Wellstone's writing, Mr. Ambler?"

"Why, yes; I am quite sure it is his."

"Then what did he write it with? It was a black pencil, medium soft, I know, but where is it?"

"No telling where he has put it, sir. Maybe the words were not written in this room. But there is little use pondering over trifles; this terrible discovery must be made known."

"They are not trifles, to my way of thinking, Mr. Ambler."

"And yet they are such, when compared with this gigantic horror here at our feet."

The detective now stooped and removed the cord from the dead man's hands and from around his neck, and examined it closely. Next he looked at the neck of the dead man, then the hands.

"It was not a suicide," he decided.

"Not suicide?" cried Ambler.

"No."

"What then?"

"A murder!"

"Good Heavens!"

"I would sooner believe that than the other," spoke the clerk.

"But what proof have you that it was a murder?" cried Ambler. "If you are right the murderer must be caught!"

"He shall be caught, never fear," said the detective, grimly. "Joe Phillips is not so easily fooled, and this fellow is not a deep enough calculator to escape me, once I get upon his track."

"But, the proof, the proof," urged the young man, excitedly. "Convince me that Bob Wellstone was murdered, and I will go into this thing with you and devote all there is of me to finding the murderer to the fate he deserves. But, surely you are mistaken, sir."

"Why am I mistaken?"

"The door was locked on the inside—one thing."

"Plenty of room for escape by the transom over the door, or by the windows, sir."

The young man stepped to a window and looked out.

"No one would risk his neck here," he decided. "And what murderer would be so foolhardy as to run the risk of discovery by trying to get out of the room by the transom?"

"A murderer is a man of risks, Mr. Ambler. This fellow was deep and calculating, but not enough so. He forgot to leave the pencil with which he wrote these words on the bottom of this letter. He would have taken this revolver, had he known it was where I found it—"

"Heavens! Can it be true that you are right, and that Bob was murdered?"

"It is certain, Mr. Ambler, and it is our

business to find the murderer and bring him to the fate he richly deserves."

"But, is there no room for mistake, Mr. Phillips?"

"None."

"But the points you have mentioned are weak, sir. Have you nothing stronger to back up your assertion?"

"Yes, I have more."

"What is it?"

"Look at that mark on the dead man's throat."

"I see it."

"Made by pulling the cord as tight as two human hands could pull it, you will admit."

"Yes; as if the owner of the hands were desperately in earnest, and Bob was a fellow of great muscular strength."

"Well, look at the hands. Do you see any marks where the cord was drawn hard around either of them? In one hand the cord was wound from the palm over the back, too."

The young man was thoughtful.

"I believe you must be right; he has been murdered," he admitted.

"Yes; I feel sure that I am right. No one intending to pull a cord with all his might would wind it that way."

"There is reason in what you say, sir."

"But, what was the motive?" queried the clerk.

"That remains to be discovered," said Phillips. "Can you throw any light upon it, Mr. Ambler?"

"I am trying my brain now, sir, to think of some one who could have a motive in killing poor Bob, but I fail to find him. If it was murder, it must be a deep and mysterious one, and I am afraid that I can be of little use to you, sir, when I could see none of these things which now seem so plain."

"I shall need little assistance, I think, Mr. Ambler, but I may call on you to get particulars concerning Mr. Wellstone's acquaintances."

"And I shall be only too glad to give you every aid in my power."

"I believe you will, sir."

CHAPTER VI.

WHAT WAS THE MOTIVE?

Bob Buckle was a close observer.

What was more, he was quick to learn, and was fast profiting by his association with a detective like Joe Phillips.

He felt a glow of satisfaction when the detective drew attention to the manner in which the cord was wound around the dead man's hands, for he had observed that himself.

It was not the way he would have taken hold of a string to pull.

Bob had innate detective talent, and he had ambition to become his employer's equal some day.

All ready for anything that was required of him, he had stood silently by while the detective and the dark young man had been talking, and now Phillips asked him:

"Well, Bob, what do you think of it?"

"It is a great case, sir, and we have got to wipe our specks and brush the dust out of our eyes."

"Do you observe anything?"

"Yes, sir."

"What is it?"

"This chair. You see how close it stands behind the door—just lets the door open, and no more."

"Yes."

"Well, see those nail scratches where some one has stood upon it?"

"Yes, I have noticed them, Bob. What more? Mr. Ambler, I have a youthful assistant here of whom I am proud."

"As I think you have reason to be, sir, from what I see," was the response, and

the young man had been paying close attention to all that Bob had said.

"There is some dust just by the door, sir, as if it had been pushed off from where it had collected. I think it is plain enough that somebody got out of the room by climbing through the transom."

"You are awake, Bob, sure enough. I noticed some of the same dust on the outside when I was opening the door. Let us see."

The detective stepped up on the chair and examined the transom.

"Yes, the dust is from here," he said.

"Then you have proof enough to convince you that it was a murder, and not suicide," remarked Ambler.

"More than enough, sir."

"And what is to be done?"

"Find the murderer, of course."

"Certainly. But I mean at once, or first tell the police?"

"Why, I shall notify the police and the coroner, and let the law be set in motion."

"And I can be of no immediate service, then?"

"No."

"Then I must go and call upon Mrs. Achterson. Poor woman! It has been a sad blow for her, for the death must have been sudden. I saw Luella—Miss Achterson—only a few days ago, and she was then in good health."

"Yes, it was a sad blow, indeed, and it has been made doubly sad."

"By this occurrence—"

"No; I refer to something else."

"What? What more has happened to give her sorrow?"

"Why, the body of her daughter is mysteriously missing, sir."

"Missing?"

"Yes."

Phillips stated the particulars briefly.

"Great mercies!" exclaimed Ambler.

"What do you make of that, sir?"

"Nothing as yet. I have merely given you the facts as they are. The lady is nearly crazed, as you can imagine."

"Indeed, the wonder is that she is not crazed quite. But your theory, sir. You surely must have a theory in respect to the matter, have you not? Who can have done so dastardly a thing?"

"I have no theory yet, and I cannot answer your question. Can you suggest anything?"

"Mrs. Achterson is wealthy?"

"Moderately so, I believe."

"Some desperate villains may have stolen the body to force money from her."

"Great Gowanus!" exclaimed Bob Buckle. "I wonder if that ain't the secret of the whole business, boss?"

"It is possible, Bob."

"Well, I must go," said Ambler, stepping to the door. "Poor Bob!" with a last look at the dead man, "to meet a fate like this!"

"Your address, before you go?" requested the detective.

"Ah, yes," and it was given.

"Do you know anything about that man?" asked the detective of the clerk, as soon as Ambler had gone out.

"Not a thing, sir."

"Ever seen him here before?"

"No."

"Did any one call on Wellstone last night?"

"Impossible for me to say, sir. The night clerk might be able to tell you about that."

"Who is he, and where can I find him?"

He was told.

"Well, you may now leave me and my boy here alone for a time," said Phillips.

"I want to investigate thoroughly, and when I have done so you can let in the police and set things in motion."

"All right, Joe. Just as you say."

So the clerk went out, and Bob and his employer were left alone together in the room.

Phillips closed the door and turned the key in the lock, after which he knelt beside the body on the floor and proceeded to make a close examination.

He opened the vest first, and felt to make sure that the man was indeed dead, for, although the hands and face were cold to the touch, he had not been fully satisfied upon that point.

Of this he had said nothing.

He could not seem to satisfy himself, even after some moments, but shook his head.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"There is warmth there," was the answer. "I believe if we could have been here an hour earlier we would have been in time to save his life."

"Too bad we wasn't, then."

"Yes."

Phillips then examined the man's pockets.

There was nothing there, however, to throw any light upon the matter. He had not been robbed, evidently, so that could not have been the motive for the deed.

Speaking to Bob, they together took the body up from the floor and laid it upon the bed.

Phillips then made a thorough inspection of the room.

With keys he had taken from the dead man's pockets, he could open all the locked drawers and the trunks without difficulty, although he could, no doubt, have opened them anyhow.

Nothing of importance was found in the drawers, but in one of the trunks were letters and papers, which the detective looked over, eager to find some clew to the mystery, but while they gave him a great deal of information concerning the dead man, they did not point out his slayer.

Presently he opened a letter that interested him.

It was of recent date, very brief, and it read as follows:

"Dearest Robert—Do you think it wise to keep our marriage longer a secret? I must see you soon for a talk. Take care not to lose the certificate. Your loving
"WIFIE."

"Ha! More complications," said the detective, to Bob. "Our friend here was a married man, and we must learn who his wife was, Bob."

"And I'll bet a sixpence to a kick behind that it was Luella," declared Bob, promptly. "His face don't look like a feller's that would play false with a lady."

"I am of the same opinion myself," agreed Phillips. "But we have got to prove it, for there is no name signed here. Now, where is that certificate? It is gone, it seems, and I might not have found this letter had I not made my search so thorough, for it was not with the rest."

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.

Business Bob assisted in the search for the certificate.

Every nook in the room was explored, but without discovery of the object sought for.

"Well, it is not here," the detective decided.

"And hence it is gone," added Bob. "I have an idea, boss."

"You generally have good ones; what is your idea in this connection?"

"That the man who killed Wellstone took the certificate away with him."

"What more?"

"Maybe that was what he did the murder for."

"I have thought of that; but there is another view to take of the matter at the same time."

"What's that?"

"Maybe the certificate was not here."

"You always like to throw cold water over my pet thinks, seems to me, boss."

"I want to train you in the habit of looking at the other side of everything that comes to your mind, that is all. Well, we are done here."

"What next?"

"We'll go to the office, after I have telephoned to the police."

They started to leave the room, but Phillips turned back to take one more look at the dead man before doing so.

He examined the body again as he had done in the first instance, carefully, thoroughly, but shook his head when done, and having done, hurried from the room, locking the door and removing the key.

They passed down to the office.

"What did you discover more?" asked the clerk.

"Very little," answered Phillips. "Here is the key. I locked the door."

"And shall I now telephone to the police and have them come here and take up the case?"

"Yes; and perhaps they will not like it because I have been here first, but that was your fault. However, they are welcome to all they can make of it; I am all at sea."

"You don't mean that, Joe."

"Why not?"

"I know you too well. You have some idea about it."

"Yes, a hundred, for that matter, and little they amount to. Just a word with you privately, Jones."

"All right."

The clerk stepped nearer, and the detective whispered to him.

Business Bob could not hear what was said, of course, but he watched the clerk's face.

He saw him start, saw a look of surprise come over his features, and when the detective had done speaking he nodded his head in the affirmative in an earnest manner.

"I depend on you," said Phillips.

"I won't fail you," was the assurance.

So they parted, and Phillips and Bob passed out and boarded a car.

The nearest police station was on their direct route, and when they reached it they left the car and entered.

"Hello, here you are yourself, eh?" the captain greeted him. "You are bound to be the early worm if you can, I find. The clerk at the — Hotel has 'phoned to us."

"Have your men set out?"

"Just a moment ago."

"All right, then. I left the door locked, and everything is just as I found it, save that I lifted the body from the floor to the bed."

"And took away the clew, if there was one?"

"Which I'll share with you. Step this way a moment."

Here, again, Phillips whispered, and Bob wondered what it was about.

He noticed that the captain looked surprised, as had the clerk, and that he nodded in the same way when he had heard all.

"You see, it may work," said the detective.

"Yes, I think it will, if it is as you think," was the response.

"I depend on you, captain."

"You know you can do that, Joe."

They saluted, with a wave of the hand, and Phillips passed out, Bob following,

and as soon as they were outside, Bob said:

"Boss, I can't stand the press."

"What press, Bob?"

"Press of curiosity, that's what."

"Ha, ha! You want to know what I said to the captain, eh?"

"And to the clerk, too, for it was the same thing, I take it. Have you got a sure enough clew, after all, boss?"

"I'll tell you the little joker in the case, Bob, and let you think what you please about it. As I said to the others, I depend on you, too, Bob, and I think you will be of big help to me."

"I'll do my level best, you bet. What is it?"

Thereupon, in low tones, the detective told Bob what he had already told the hotel clerk and the police captain.

Bob was surprised at what he heard, and an exclamation escaped him.

"Great Gowanus!" he cried. "Who would 'a' thought it?"

"It may not be so, but I hope it is."

"Me, too, you bet!"

Just at that moment singing broke upon their ears.

"Trolley cars am all d'e go,
Bet yo' life d'at d'ey ain' slow;
Horses d'ey not in d'e fight,
Lectric lines am out ob sight!"

"That's Glossy!" cried Bob. "Where is he?"

"There he comes, on that car," answered the detective.

"Sure enough, there he is, as big as life and as grand as Cuffy!"

A car was coming abreast with them, and the darky was in front with the motorman.

The latter was grinning from ear to ear, well pleased with the song, no doubt, but just then Bob called out to Glossy and the singing stopped instantly, and the singer bolted.

He hurried through the car to the rear and alighted safely while the car was in motion.

"Hello!" he then responded to Bob's greeting.

"Still singing, are you?" asked Bob. "Haven't you come to the end of that song yet, Glossy?"

"Goodness! no; an' ain' likely to, either, I reckon."

"How is that?"

"I make up a new verse about every five minutes, d'at's how it am, an' it is soon gwine to take me all day to sing 'em all."

"You had better take a vacation, then, and go down to some barren sand beach and sing it out. If you keep it up here in Brooklyn you will be declared a public nuisance."

"Oh, you git out. But hol' on Mr. Phillips, it is you I want, and d'on tol' me to fotch yo' double quick."

"Who did?" asked the detective, stopping short.

"D'e clerk at d'e hotel."

"W'y, we just came from there."

"Can't help d'at, sah."

"What's wanted?"

"D'e mischief am to pay, d'e clerk say. Yo' see, I went d'ar' to se what was up, an' got d'ar' after yo' had gone, an' d'e clerk tell me to git a gait on an' find yo' instanter."

"Yes, yes; that's all right; but what has happened?"

"He said tell you d'e body hab' misappeared—"

"The body has disappeared?"

"D'at's d'e word, sah."

"What the deuce can this mean?" cried the detective. "Come, Bob, we'll have to take a car and go back and find out about this. It is getting so thick that it will stick, if we don't watch it. Another

disappearance—what are we coming to, anyhow?"

"Guess I will hab' to go with yo'," observed Glossy. "I am beginnin' to git interested in d'is fing myself. Heah comes a car, boss, an' ef yo' don't 'ject to my color, I'll ride along. And he broke out singing:

"Oh! d'e trolley car it run on wheels,
Nebber know how good it feels;
Git aboard an' come along,
While I sing my little song!"

CHAPTER VIII.

STARTLING STATEMENT.

Business Bob caught hold of Glossy, in play.

"Choke off, Glossy!" he cried. "If you want to ride with us, you have got to drop that."

"Can't do it, nohow, Bob. You go 'long on d'is car; I will wait for d'e nex'. I'll git d'ar 'mos' as soon as you, anyhow. You don't know a good song when you hear it."

"That's what's the matter, I guess, Glossy. I know I have heard a good deal of that one, and it gets worse all the time."

"D'at am all right, Bobbsey; yo' 'tend to yo' business an' I'll see to mine."

The detective had signaled the coming car, and Bob followed him and got on board, and as the car started off they left Glossy singing:

"Trolley ride am mighty nice,
'Bout d'e biggest thing on ice;
Turn d'e crank an' let 'er run,
Bet yo' nebber had sech fun!"

And from that he rolled off into another verse, but his words could not be caught, and the detective and Business Bob enjoyed a laugh as their car rolled away with a hum and a buzz.

In a brief time they were back again at the hotel.

A good deal of excitement of a quiet kind was now noticeable, and policemen were seen about.

The clerk was engaged in conversation with a police detective, and their faces brightened as they saw Joe Phillips approaching.

"What is this I hear?" demanded Joe.

"The body is gone," said the clerk.

"How did it go?"

"That is for you to say, you were the last one in the room."

"And I locked the door when I came out and left the key with you. My boy here will bear me out in that."

"That's straight," spoke up Bob.

"Well, I went up right after you had gone, with one of the proprietors, and there was no dead man in the room then," declared the clerk.

"Not a sign of a dead man," agreed the proprietor, who was standing near. "I would like to have this thing cleared up, gentlemen, for it is not good for my house."

"We'll do our best, of course," said the police detective.

"Certainly we will," echoed Phillips. "But, Jones, are you doubly certain of what you say? You saw the body on the floor; I told you I had put it on the bed when I handed you the key. Did you look on the bed?"

"Yes, we looked on the bed."

"Well, here will be a sensation for the papers, sure enough. Was the door locked the same as I left it?"

"It was locked, yes."

"That is the way I left it. Hello! here are some reporters. How fast news does travel! Come, let's all go up to the room and see what we can see."

So they did, reporters and all, but their visit amounted to nothing. The body of Robert Wellstone was gone, and there

was no clew to lead to its recovery, that is, no clew that they could discover.

The reporters, needless to say, kept their tongues and pencils busy, and made much of the mystery.

The body was gone; it was not to be found.

"What is your opinion?" asked the police detective, as he and Joe Phillips left the room together and went down.

"Suppose we sit down in the reading-room and talk it over for a few minutes, and put our heads together, as it were," the private detective suggested.

"Nothing would suit me better."

"Come on, then."

"I'll wait for you in the lobby, boss," said Bob.

"All right, wait for me there, Bob; I won't be a great while here," was the response.

So the two detectives entered the reading-room, while Business Bob passed on through to the lobby, where he heard a voice humming:

"When d'e car goes down a grade,
D'en yo' mus'n' be afraid;
Have a trolley to yo' hat,
So d'e win' won't capture d'at!"

There was Pete, with a pleased audience of two or three of the hotel porters standing around him, and all were grinning from ear to ear at the nonsensical jingles he was reeling off by the yard.

"Great Gowanus!" cried Bob. "Still at it, are you, Glossy?"

"Seems to me yo' is allu's boun' to interrupt me, Bob," the darky complained, stopping short. "What am d'e news?"

"Come over here, and I'll tell you. Seems to me you are taking a day off, today, ain't you?"

"Yes, I am gittin' ready to open on d'at corner I tole yo' about."

"I see. Well, I wish you luck, of course."

"An' I'll hab' it, I 'pine. But, what is all d'e rumpus 'bout d'at body bein' clean gone?"

Bob stated the matter as it was known to the public generally, or soon would be, and continued talking with the darky till the detectives made their appearance.

"Come on, Bob," said Phillips.

"Right with you, sir. So long, Glossy, till I see you again."

"So long, Bobbsey. Come an' see me when I git open fo' business, and I'll sing d'at whole song—"

"No, thank you; I guess I'll stay away," laughing. And Bob followed his employer out, leaving the jolly darky rendering another verse of his never-ending song, something like this:

"Goes up hill d'e same as down,
Take yo' 'all around d'e town;
Horses now all out ob use;
Run d'e cars by lightnin' juice!"

"Well, where to now, boss?" asked Bob.

"To see Mrs. Achterson again. Hope Ambler is still there, too."

"So do I."

"Why?"

"Want to see how he will take this new bit of news."

"Yes, and I may want you to shadow him for me. I am not sure on that score yet."

"Well, I guess I can do it. That is right in my line of business, and I am all business, from the ground up to my hat. I think I can do him up brown if I set my eyes on him."

"Maybe you have got them on him already, Bob."

"Yes, maybe I have, and I want to know all about him before I take 'em off again, too."

They continued their conversation until they boarded a car, but let the matter drop and said no more until they alighted

again, when they were soon at Mrs. Achterson's door.

The same woman admitted them.

It could be seen that she had been weeping, the same as her mistress.

"Has Mrs. Achterson company?" asked Phillips.

"Yes, sir."

"It is Mr. Ambler?"

"Yes."

"Very well; announce me."

They were soon shown into the sitting-room we have seen before.

Mrs. Achterson was all but prostrated with grief, and Phillips saw that the calling of Ambler had not helped her.

"There is new and terrible news, Mr. Ambler tells me," the woman said, as soon as the detective entered the room. "Do you think it possible that it has been a murder, Mr. Phillips?"

"I feel certain of it."

"But where was the motive? There was a slight excuse for suicide."

"No, there is never a justifiable excuse for the latter, madam, nor for the former, save in a villainous mind."

"I agree with you there," spoke up Ambler, immediately.

"And that is not all the mystery, either," said the detective.

"Not all?"

"No."

"What is there more?" asked Ambler.

"Why, the body of Wellstone, too, is mysteriously missing, and can't be discovered."

Ambler gave a great start, made a motion as if he would spring to his feet, but restrained himself, and a slight paleness appeared for an instant upon his swart face.

CHAPTER IX.

SOME PROOFS HERE.

Phillips and his assistant both noted these things.

They exchanged no glance, however, for the reason that the detective did not look in Bob's direction.

"Heavens!" the young man exclaimed. "Was it not bad enough? And, what mean all these mysteries? See how it affects Mrs. Achterson, sir. You should not have mentioned it."

Mrs. Achterson was trembling, and there was a wild expression in her eyes.

"It is frightful!" she cried. "First, the death of my daughter; then the disappearance of her body. Then the murder of Robert, and now the news that his body, too, is missing! I shall go raving, distracted, if something is not done speedily!"

"And you have still no clew?" asked Ambler.

"No definite clew," the detective answered. "I shall devote the rest of the day to finding one."

"And what brings you here now?" asked the woman.

"You bade me come again soon."

"I did not look for you quite so soon, however."

"Pardon my intrusion then, madam; but I have some business besides."

"What is it?"

"Can you show me a specimen of your daughter's handwriting?"

"Yes, certainly."

The woman rose and stepped to a writing desk in the room.

"What can you want with a specimen of the poor young lady's handwriting, Mr. Phillips?" queried Ambler.

"To compare with other writing, of course, sir. I have a specimen which I think is hers, but of which I am not quite sure. It can be easily decided when I see what is known to be hers."

"Why, sir, it is more easily decided than that."

"How?"
 "Let Mrs. Achterson say."
 "Why, certainly; I would know, sir," the lady declared.

"I did not want to trouble you in that way, madam, and cause you a pang of pain if it did happen to be hers."

"Yet you gave her more trouble," assumed Ambler.

"My object would have remained hidden but for your question."

"Ah, true; pardon me."

Mrs. Achterson had by this time found a letter in her daughter's writing, and, first looking at it, she handed it to the detective.

Phillips saw at a glance that the writer of the note he had found in Wellstone's trunk and the writer of this letter were the same person, and he handed the letter back.

"I see it is not the same," he observed, in order to avoid further comment upon the matter.

"Then may we ask what it was you found?" inquired Ambler.

"It is of no importance now, sir."

"Pardon me."

There was a pause, then, and there was only one thing for Mr. Ambler to do, which was (pardon so execrable a pun) to amble.

"Well, I will take leave, Mrs. Achterson," he said, rising. "Needless for me to assure you that my heart bleeds for you in your trouble. I shall be eager to hear of the recovery of the body—"

"You shall hear, sir; you shall hear," was eagerly interrupted.

"And you, Mr. Phillips, do your very best in the matter, and leave no stone unturned—not only in this case, but in the other as well. I shall be eager to have you call on me."

"I will do so, shortly," the detective promised.

Ambler bowed then, and left the room and the house.

No sooner had he gone out than Phillips said to Bob:

"I will excuse you, Bob. You get what information you can in another direction and report to me when you find there is nothing more to be had. Be off with you now."

"All right, boss, I understand," and Bob lost no time in making his exit.

He understood that he was to watch Mr. George Ambler, and learn what was possible in that particular direction.

He quickly caught sight of his suspect.

"Now, madam," remarked the detective, as soon as Bob had gone; "have you been holding something back from me?"

The woman started.

"Why, no, sir," she answered.

"You told me that Mr. Wellstone was your daughter's accepted lover."

"Yes; so he was, sir."

"Then you were not aware that he was a married man, of course?"

"A married man! Heavens! no!"

"Such he was, none the less."

"I cannot believe it, Mr. Phillips. He seemed the soul of honor."

"This will prove it to you, then, madam," taking the letter from his pocket and handing it to her.

It was the letter he had found in Wellstone's trunk.

"My daughter's writing!" the woman exclaimed, the moment her eyes fell upon it.

"You recognize it. Well, read it."

"Mercy! she was his wife already!"

"So it appears, madam, and for some reason Wellstone had desired it kept a secret."

"What mystery is here?"

"That remains to be discovered, madam. It is no trifling one, be assured of that."

There is some powerful motive somewhere."

"But you are unable to discover it?"

"I have not had time yet to work upon the case. I have scarcely begun."

"Then, in mercy, to work and clear the matter up! This suspense is more than I can bear! My daughter married? I cannot realize that it was so."

"Yet you hold the proof of it in your hand."

"No doubting it."

"That is the proof I wanted, madam."

"What is?"

"The proof that your daughter was the writer of that note. I recognized the writing the moment you showed it to me—"

"Yet you declared that you did not."

"For a purpose. Will you keep this knowledge secret for a time?"

"If you desire so; it shall not be made known to a living soul."

"I know I can trust you, or I would not have let you into it with me. Now, does this suggest anything to your mind?"

"I do not understand, sir."

"What I mean, then, this may possibly open to your mind some new theory in regard to a motive."

"It does not, sir. If anything, it makes it more complicated than ever. Why was the body of my child stolen? Why was Robert Wellstone murdered? It is more than I can grasp."

"Was there any property at stake?"

"None, save that insurance."

"But, you have some wealth?"

"Only enough to keep up a moderate appearance, sir."

"Then we must look to Mr. Wellstone's side of the house for the explanation, I think."

"But, sir, my daughter's body? Where can that be? What have they done with the dear form? Oh, sir, you must recover it, or I cannot long retain my reason!"

"If it is to be found, madam, believe me I will restore it to you. Now I will take my leave, in order not to excite you needlessly. You must force a calmness if possible."

"I have tried, but it is impossible. You are my only hope, sir, and if you fail me, then all is lost!"

"I will not fail you!" Joe Phillips promised.

CHAPTER X.

BOB GETS IN A LICK.

Business Bob was equipped with some changes for disguise.

When he set out to follow George Ambler one of the first things he did was to spring a false mustache fast to his lip.

These things had been provided for him by Phillips, whose apprentice he really was, and from him he had taken more lessons than one during the time he had been in his employ.

Bob knew many a "wrinkle" well worth knowing, in connection with the profession.

Ambler had set forward at a lively pace. The address he had given the detective was in New York, but Bob soon made up his mind that he was not going in the direction of New York now.

Or, if he was, then he did not know much about Brooklyn, and did not know the nearest route from the part of the city he was now in. But, that was not it, as Bob had to admit presently.

From one street to another the man went, and once or twice he looked back, as if to make sure that he was not being followed.

Finally, he reduced his pace, and at last ascended the steps of a house.

Bob noticed that he did not ring, but let himself in with a key, which was proof in itself that he was no stranger there.

"Great Gowanus!" Bob exclaimed to himself. "What is up now? If he is at home here and has a place in New York besides, he must be a sort of double, I suspect."

He sauntered past the house, and noted its number without appearing to give it attention.

When he had gone a little distance past he stopped.

A doctor's gig was standing by the curb, and passing around that he made a change in his disguise in that brief time.

On the opposite side of the street, and nearly opposite the house into which Ambler had disappeared, was a house without a tenant, and crossing over to that, Bob sat down on the steps.

"Now," he said to himself, "come what may, I am prepared for it. I have scored one point, if I don't get any more."

He had been there only a little time when he heard:

"On d'ese cars you need no fan,
 D'ey run on d'e air line plan;
 Jes' lay back, as on she go,
 Let the win' fr'u' yo' whiskers blow."

"Great Gowanus!" cried Bob, straightening up and looking. "That song is the nightmare of my existence, and I see no way to get rid of it except to kill the nig, and I hate to do that. Here he comes, right this way, and who ever heard such stuff as that?"

"When a lady git aboard,
 Give yo' seat up like a lord;
 Fo' de car might give er flap,
 An' seat de lady on yo' lap."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Bob. "I'd like to heave a pavin' block at his head, but it wouldn't do, for he would holler out my name, and that might upset the sloop. I'd holler at him and tell him to shut his black face up, but that would be as bad. Guess I'll have to grin and bear it until he passes out of hearing, and I hope he won't be long about it."

"Ef yo' don' want yo' watch to stop,
 Carry it in a dinner pot;
 Ef yo' wear a diamon' pin,
 Don' set whar' d'e sun come in!"

Bob was looking around for a loose stone, a brick, or something, but just as that verse was finished the darky came to his destination.

He mounted the steps of the same house into which Ambler had gone!

"Great Gowanus!" again exclaimed the apprentice, with more than his usual vigor. "What is takin' him there, I wonder? If this pudding ain't gettin' thick, then I'd like to know it!"

Pete pulled the bell, and Bob dropped his head and watched the door out from under the brim of his hat.

Little or nothing of his face could be seen.

Some one opened the door, and Pete delivered a note. The person said something and closed the door again, and the darky waited, breaking out into song and reeling off three or four more verses.

The door presently reopened, the same person gave a note into Pete's hand, together with something that had the glint of a silver coin. The darky grinned and doffed his hat as he accepted it, descending the steps and hastening off at once, the person at the door looking after him for a moment.

Pete went singing with even more vim than ever, and Bob did not stir while the door was held open.

Even after it had been closed he waited a little longer.

When he got up he sauntered off lazily and leisurely, as if he had nothing to do, and all day to do it in.

Once away from the house, however, he quickened his pace, and ere long came up with his darky friend, who was still sing-

ing away as if his life depended on it, and Bob gave him a thump on the back.

That particular verse was not finished.

"What yo' doin'?" cried Pete, looking around with fire in his eyes, but on seeing who it was he grinned.

"I'm trying to knock some of the sing out of you, that is all," answered Bob, "an' I'll do it, too, if you worry me much longer with that song of nonsense you are harping on."

"It will nebber get out ob me in any other way, Bobbsey, d'at am sure," was the rejoinder. "Verses come to me faster d'an I kin sing 'em, d'at am d'e fack, an' some ob d'e best ones git away 'fore I kin git fast holt onto 'em. Say, Bob, know what I fink?"

"No, I don't; didn't know you thought at all."

"I think I am born to make a poet—"

"Great Gowanus! that is worse than ever. I'll speak for a place for you in the asylum. But, say, what took you to that house?"

"What house?"

"Why, the one you just came from, of course."

"What yo' know 'bout d'at?"

"I'm trying to find out something now. Come, no fooling out of you, but answer my question."

"Beats all how you know eberything, Bob Buckle. I believe you jes' spend yo' whole time watchin' me, and I bet I knows what yo' am up to; yo' can't fool me a whole lot."

"What do you mean now?"

"You am tryin' to steal my song away from me to—"

"Bother your song! I have got something of more importance on hand than that. Answer my question."

"Well, I took a note d'ar', d'at was all."

"Who was it for?"

"Look heah, Bob, d'is am my game—"

"Oh! your head is thicker than your tongue, a good deal. I have been shadowing that house, and—"

"Ho! Why didn't yo' say so in d'e f'us' place, d'en? If d'at am d'e case, I be glad 'nuff to do all I kin to 'lighten yo' mind on any subjeck what come wid'in d'e wide range ob—"

"Oh! shut up! Who was that note for?"

"Samuel Kerner."

"And who is the answer directed to?"

"Richard Wardhouse, over in — street, No. 242."

"Let me see it."

"Can't do d'at, Bob."

"Why not?"

"'Ca'se I was told bery p'tic'lar not to let it go out ob my hands, and I have got a dollar out ob d'e t'ing."

"Well, you needn't let it go out of your hands, but I have got to see it all the same, if I have to throw you down and take it away from you. I mean business, you bet!"

"Well, I 'pine d'at settles it."

"It will settle it, if you make me do it."

"Heah she am, den; but don' open it, or d'ey will know it hab' been tampered with."

He gave the sealed envelope into Bob's hands, and Bob looked at the address in a very critical manner, turning the letter over and looking at the back as well.

"Glossy, it isn't far out of your way to come with me to the office before you deliver this letter, and you will have to come along. Joe Phillips would give his right hand, almost, to know what's in this, and he would bounce me on the spot if he knew I had let it get away," the detective apprentice explained.

"Well, you am boss ob d'e situation, I guess, Bobbsey."

CHAPTER XI.

PART FOR BOB TO PLAY.

Glossy Pete could not have helped it if he would; Business Bob was boss of the situation, and they set forward for the detective's office.

As Bob forbade Pete's singing, the darky had to content himself with the next best thing, which was to whistle the air of his never-ending song, running the verses over in his mind as he did so.

Bob carried the letter.

When they came to their destination they found Phillips there.

He had just come in, and was looking over his mail, this being his first opportunity that day.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, on seeing Bob.

"Same to you, boss," was the response.

"And you, too, Lampblack!"

"Better call him Stove-polish," suggested Bob.

"What's the difference?"

"The shine. But this ain't no time for foolin', boss; jest cast your weather eye at this letter."

He surrendered it as he spoke.

"What about it?"

"I s'pose the insides will tell that."

"Yes, but let me hear about the outside, first; that is, where did you get it?"

"Bobbsey took it off'n me," spoke up Glossy, "and I done got it off'n d'e man what writ' it, who was sendin' it to t'other feller."

"You make it very clear. Bob, what about it?"

"Well, I followed our man to his destination, which was to a house on — street," giving the number. "While I was shadowing the house, this deeper shadow came along—"

"You 'ludin' to me?" interrupted Glossy.

"Yes, I'm alluding to you. Hold your tongue while I tell the boss. Came along and stopped there with the note, as I was going to say, boss, and he waited for answer, the which same I have gobbled up and brought here to you. Question is, did our man write it?"

"Who was the other note for, boy?" to Glossy.

"Fo' Samuel Kerner."

"That certainly is not George Ambler."

"Not by name," agreed Bob, "but it may be in fact, you see."

"You are right. As there is no stamp on this missive, I will investigate, I think."

"If I'd thought you wouldn't, I'd a' done it myself, sure pop," declared Business Bob. "The key to the whole matter may be inside that envelope, and I'm more than eager to see what it is."

The letter was deftly opened, in a manner which would defy after detection.

"If there is nothing in it to concern us, no harm done," observed the detective, "and nobody will ever be the wiser. If it does concern this case, it may be all that you say of it, Bob. Hold your breath, now, while I take a survey of the inside."

The detective drew forth the sheet as he spoke, and deftly opened it, while Glossy softly whistled his happy tune.

It proved a double find.

Not only was the answer there, but the original message as well.

The reply had been penciled on the same sheet, as is very often done in moments of haste, or when paper is not handy.

They read as follows:

"Samuel Kerner, Esq."

"Dear sir—Is the matter all right? Why do I not hear from you? When and where am I to meet you to straighten up? Answer."

"RICHARD WARDHOUSE."

"Wardhouse—Yes, it is all right, but some other things are all wrong. Don't worry me now, but have a little patience, for I have got to go very slow. Be there to-night at nine."

"KERNER."

"What is it, boss, what is it?" eagerly inquired Bob, as the detective sat musing after he had read it.

"Something we have got to investigate," informed Phillips, and he read aloud what the sheet contained.

"Should think we would have to investigate!" cried Bob. "Maybe it is just what I said—the key to the whole crib of mystery. It is certain that these two have been up to some kind of didos, anyhow."

"Well, am yo' done with it?" asked Glossy.

"Yes, I am done with it, my boy. I'll seal it and you can deliver it."

"An' what d'en?"

"Why, nothing further, unless another note should be fired back again, in which case bring it here before you deliver it."

"I see, sah."

"And here you are."

The envelope was sealed anew and handed to the darky.

Glossy took it, passed out of the room, and went down the stairs singing:

"Ef yo's readin' while yo' ride,
Don' hol' yo' paper two yards wide;
Yo's cuttin' off de others' view,
An' d'ey may rise an' go fo' you!"

The detective and his apprentice could not help smiling as they listened, and they smiled more at a part of the next verse.

"Well, now what's on the docket?" asked Bob.

"I have an idea."

"That's nothing new."

"What, the idea?"

"No, that you have got it; you are full of 'em."

"Well, I will accept the amendment, Bob. I have a notion to play a little game on these two fellows."

"What is it?"

"Why, send a note to each of them, making it appear that it is from the other, and appoint a meeting. Each would go, and I could be on hand to hear what would come of it."

"Do it, boss, do it!"

"There is one thing in the way, Bob."

"What is it?"

"Think for yourself. That is one thing I am trying to train you in, looking at the other side of every situation."

"Well, let's see, then. In the first place, it would show them both that a third party was playing a fine Italian hand somewhere, and that would put them on their guard—"

"You have struck it the first fire! That is just it; I think I had better hold back that card just a little before I play it."

"Mebby you are right; you 'most always are, boss."

"I think I am. We will hold that in reserve, anyway, in case it comes into play anywhere. How is your nerve to-day?"

"Steady."

"Do you think you could get into that house where you left Ambler?"

"I can make a try for it, anyhow. You know I have a way of getting there when I set out to do a thing."

"That is the reason I want you to undertake this. I don't clearly see how you are going to do it, for I don't want you to mention Wardhouse; that would give away the thing."

"As bad as the other card. But Ambler will know me, boss."

"You won't go till he has left the house."

"And how am I to know?"

"It won't do for me to be telling you every move, you must plan for yourself. Perhaps this is a little difficult, however. I think I will disguise you in a clever manner, on second thought."

"Go ahead."

"I will freckle you pretty plentifully, and you can change your clothes and put on another hat, and then if you do meet Ambler he will not be likely to know you."

"Good enough; put on the freckles, boss. I will go and ask for Kerner, and if he is there I will go right off and leave no explanation, only thing I can do, unless you want me to wade right in."

"That will do, I think."

"And if he isn't there, I'll declare that I have got to wait and see him, no matter what breaks, and will get into the house on that 'scuse. It is no small task you have set for me, boss, sure enough."

"That is the reason I inquired about your nerve. You will get there somehow, I have every confidence of that, and being a boy, you can do it better than I could do it myself. Now for the disguise, and I'll make such a change in you that your own mother would stumble over you and never know you."

CHAPTER XII.

BOB BUCKLE IN HOT WATER.

Apprentice Bob hardly knew himself when he looked in the glass.

The change in his appearance was remarkable, and the freckles in themselves were a perfect disguise.

"Great Gowanus!" he exclaimed. "Introduce me to myself, won't you, boss?"

The detective laughed, while he admired his handiwork.

"You will pass, that is certain," he averred. "Make ready, now, and be off with you, and be back again in two hours."

"All right; I will be here, if nothing breaks. If I'm not, you will know where to take up the trail to find me, and you want to make a smoke in their camp if they do any damage to me."

"I will, you bet. But you must take care that they do not get a chance to do you damage, as you express it."

"I'll try to, boss. Well, so long; notice of funeral hereafter."

Phillips laughed, and Bob hastened off. In due time he was in the neighborhood of his destination, and he slackened his pace while he thought.

Here he was on the ground, but how was he to proceed? He had been trying to figure it out as he came along, but thus far without success, and it seemed a hard nut to crack.

"Wish the boss had shed some more daylight on the matter," he said to himself. "Maybe he was stuck himself and couldn't—but no, they don't stick Joe Phillips as easy as that; he only wants me to do my own thinking, that is all, and I will have to do it."

He ran different schemes over in his mind.

There was something to act as a drawback to every one of them. If he asked for Kerner he might be taken right in to see him, and what could he say.

He decided to act upon the plan that seemed the most feasible of any, and so he continued on, mounted the steps and rang the bell, and when the door was opened, he inquired:

"Who lives here, please?"

"Mr. Howson Carper," was the answer.

This was a set-back for the apprentice, but he met it promptly.

"That isn't the name I was lookin'

for," he said, musingly. "Any boarders kept here?"

"What name do you want?"

"Don't know; I have forgot."

Bob was acting as if not very bright.

"Well, there are no boarders here, but Mr. Carper has friends who come and see him on business more or less."

"Mebby it's one of them."

"There is a Mr. Kerner for one; is that the name?"

"Sounds like it. Is he here now?"

"Has gone out."

"Then Mr. Carper is at home?"

"No; he is absent at present. But what do you want?"

"I must see Mr. Kerner without fail. That is the name, I guess. I must come in and wait for him."

"But I don't know when he will be back."

"That don't make any difference; I will wait till he does come, or until Mr. Carper comes."

"You will have a long wait, my lad. You had better tell me the business, and maybe I can do what is wanted. Who sent you here, anyhow?"

"That is something I can't tell. The only thing I can do is to come in and wait, and I'll keep right on waiting, if you will give me something to eat and let me sleep on the floor."

"Your errand must be important."

"Of course it is."

"Well, come in, for this is no place to talk so long."

The man stepped back from the door to allow Bob to enter, and the detective's apprentice stepped in.

As soon as the door had closed, the man seized Bob's arm roughly and hurried him into the nearest room, where he took a good look at him without saying a word.

"Think you will know me next time?" Bob asked.

"I want to know you this time," was the fierce response. "I want to know what you are nosing around here for."

"What I'm nosing around here for?"

"Yes, just that."

"I am not nosing, sir; I came right open and told you what I wanted. Seems to me you are the one that's prying."

"And I want to know the whole business, too. I want to know who you are, who sent you, and what you want to see Mr. Kerner for, and the whole business. Come, now, speak right up."

"Who the mischief are you?" Bob demanded.

He had at first taken the man to be a servant, when he had spoken so meekly at the door.

Now he decided in his mind that he was the master of the house, if anything, and he believed that it was Carper himself, if the man had given his right name, or whether he had or not.

"You will find out who I am if you don't speak up."

"That's what I want to do. But, you are taking the wrong course with me, for I won't tell now, if I die for it!"

"You won't, eh?"

"No. I wouldn't even tell Carper."

"We'll have to see about that, my gentleman. Who sent you here?"

"I'll never tell you. The man I want to see is Kerner, and I mean to see him if I have to stay all night."

"You will remain, have no doubts on that score. You will stay here, and maybe a good deal longer than you are figuring on staying. That is, unless you are more reasonable."

Bob saw that he was in for it.

He had invaded a place where there was danger, and there was suspicion against him.

On entering the room, the man had released his hold upon him, and stood with his back to the door, and there was an expression upon his face which Bob did not like to see.

Bob looked around.

There was another door to the room, and two windows in front.

The latter could not do him any good, but the door might, if he could make a bolt and get through it before the man caught him.

He had come there for the purpose of learning what he could about the interior of the house, its inmates, and what not, but if he allowed himself to be made a prisoner he would fail.

He decided to bolt, and lead the man a race from the top to the bottom of the house if he could.

"What do you mean?" he asked, while thinking.

"I mean that I am going to hold you a prisoner if you don't tell me what has brought you here," the man growled.

"You do, eh?"

Bob had noticed that the other door was ajar, and he knew it would be a queer house if there was not still another door leading out of that room.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, you will have to catch me first, boss, now that you have let go of me. I'm off!"

Bob wheeled and made a dart for the door, and was through before the man hardly realized what had taken place, but with an oath the man was after him in the next instant.

Bob had slammed the door shut, and was looking around for the other as he ran, which he espied immediately, and for which he made with no loss of time.

There was a key in the lock, which he jerked out, with the thought that he would lock the man in.

He had no time for that, however, for by the time he opened this door the man had opened the other, and was leaping after him.

With the key in his hand Bob made a dash along the hall toward the front, and could have escaped undoubtedly, unless the front door was locked, and he felt sure it was not.

To do that, however, would be to make a failure of the business that had brought him there, and he had no intention of doing that, even if he did have to run some big risks to accomplish it. So, instead of making for the doors, he turned and darted up the stairs.

CHAPTER XIII.

ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE STILL.

"Ha! now I have got you!"

So cried the man exultingly, as he ran after him.

"I expect you have," answered Bob. "I told you I had come to stay, but not as a prisoner."

"You may stay as worse than a prisoner if you don't stop instantly. Stop, or I will shoot you, and bring you to a stop in a way that you won't relish! Do you hear me?"

Bob had just reached the top, having taken two or three steps at a stride; now he glanced back.

Sure enough, the man had a pistol in his hand, and Bob jerked back out of sight quicker than a wink, while he shouted:

"Two can play at that game, and you commenced it, so look out for yourself if you poke your nose where you hadn't ought to! Maybe I am just as good a shot as you are!"

The fact of the matter was, Bob had no pistol at all!

His words caused the man to slacken his pace, nevertheless, for he had good regard for health.

"I tell you to surrender!" he cried. "You can't escape me, and I will make it all the worse for you when I do get you, mind that! Come right down here, or I will blaze away at you!"

"And I'll blaze back again," cried Bob. "Don't you dare to put your head in sight, for if you do I will knock some of the ornaments off of it, sure as you are born!"

The man stormed, but he had stopped, and Bob crept silently to the nearest door, which he tried.

It opened, and he passed in, and there being a key in the lock, he locked it after him.

No one was in the room, which looked like a private sitting-room.

Bob thought it strange that no one had come to the man's aid, for they had made a great deal of noise and had spoken in loud tones.

He was forced to believe that there were no others in the house, or that they were all deaf, if there were others about. He wondered what kind of a place he had got into.

The man had heard the key turn.

Bob heard him bound up the remaining steps, and the man threw himself against the door.

This room looked like the one below—there was a door leading into another, and Bob believed that another door connected that room with the hall. No sooner the thought than he ran to see.

He was right, and he was only just in time, for just as he turned the key and made it fast, the man tried it.

"No you don't!" cried Bob.

"Curse you! I have got you there anyhow!"

"Yes, and I have got you there. Look out for bullets!"

Bob was amused as well as excited, for he had nerves that hardly admitted of fear.

He looked around the apartment, and tried to determine what kind of a household it was by so doing. The room showed a woman's care, but there were no woman's effects lying around.

The man was thundering at the door with his fists.

"Open this door, I tell you!" he was ordering. "Open it, or I will break it in!"

"Break away, if you want to," Bob cheerfully invited. "You will have to stand the damage and take the risk of a bullet as soon as you show yourself. I am all right, and I hope you are."

"I'll make you all right, curse you!"

Bob was making a closer inspection of the room now.

The closets were empty of clothes, which indicated that the room was not at present occupied. In the end of one closet was a crack, and a door opened and disclosed a flight of narrow stairs tending upward, and without hesitation Bob ascended, silently, to explore the region above, whatever it might be.

The door closed after him.

It was about as peculiar a staircase as he had ever seen.

It was barely wide enough for a person to pass, certainly not a bit more, and it was built in between the front and rear closets.

Reaching the top, he found there a door that seemed to have no knob or other means by which to open it, but when he pushed it opened, rather stiffly, yet almost silently.

Here was another handsomely furnished room.

Bob looked in cautiously, and saw that it was occupied, there being two women in it.

One, an old crone, or almost such, was listening intently at the hall door, to learn what was going on in the halls below, while the other was sitting up in bed, a look of fright upon her face.

The latter was a young, handsome woman, with a pale face.

She had her eyes upon the old woman at the door.

Neither had seen Bob.

Softly Bob let the door close again, until there was only a crack for him to look through. There he stood and watched, listening.

The man below was storming louder than ever, but now began to throw himself against the door with all his force, and the young woman in the bed wrung her hands in very terror.

"What does it mean?" Bob heard her gasp.

"Sh!" cautioned the old woman, holding up a finger. "Some drunken wretch must have entered."

"I believe you are not telling me the truth, but that some friends are coming to my aid. Oh! why will you not accept my offers and assist me to escape from this horrible place?"

"Hold your tongue, fool!"

The old woman shook her fist savagely, angry at being interrupted at her listening, it seemed.

"But—"

"Shut up, I tell you!"

This time it was so savagely spoken that the young woman lay down and covered her face with her hands.

Just then came a crash below, as the door went in under the man's strong assault, and Bob heard his voice plainer than before, demanding his (Bob's) surrender, at once.

Bob thought that he was in a trap now certainly.

Below was the man, who, he believed, would not hesitate to shoot, and here in this other room was the old woman who looked like a veritable wildcat.

Bob was between two fires, as it were, but decided upon taking his chances in a scrap with the old woman the moment the man showed his head below. But, odd it seemed, the man did not appear.

Bob looked down, but no ray of light was to be seen.

The door in the closet had closed after him, and he was in total darkness, for he had closed the door at hand.

He heard the man running this way and that in the room below, heard him open and shut the closet doors, and heard him swearing like a pirate because the object of his search was not to be found.

"Great Gowanus!" exclaimed Bob, "is it possible that he don't know about this secret stairs?"

It certainly appeared so.

The man made a thorough search, even raising the windows to look out, as the hiding prisoner could hear.

But the detective apprentice was not to be found, and it was only too plain that the man did not know about the staircase, or he would long ere this have explored it to see if he was hiding there.

Presently a door slammed, and, running steps were heard on the stairs.

There came a knock at the door of the room where the women were, and Bob opened the secret door just a little.

He hoped that it was a secret door, since it was not known to the man, and he was not mistaken, for such it was. When closed, it fitted tightly into the panels of the room.

The old woman opened the door, and the man appeared, his face fairly distorted with rage.

"Where can that boy be?" he cried.

"What boy?"

"Fool! Idiot! To pretend that you have not heard it all! A boy entered the rooms under these and locked himself in, and I cannot find him. Where can he have concealed himself?"

CHAPTER XIV.

BOB'S NEXT DODGE.

The old hag looked as amazed as the man.

"I'm sure I don't know," she declared. "He must have got out without your seeing him."

"You know of no secret place in the rooms where he can be hiding? You know the old house better than any one else. I have looked everywhere, but he is not to be found."

"No. There is no secret place, to my knowledge, sir. He must have got out, as I said."

"Well, I am forced to believe that you are right."

Bob, of course, felt highly elated as he listened to this.

It was certain that the man did not know anything about the secret stairway!

And it seemed equally as certain that the woman had no knowledge of it, unless she was lying to the man.

Bob waited silently, knowing that developments would show whether she was lying or telling the truth. If the former, she desired to keep the secret from the man.

"He must have slipped out at the moment when you broke in the door," the woman suggested.

"I see no other way, and yet I could almost swear that you are mistaken in that."

"I must be right, if you are sure he is not in the room."

"And I am sure of that part of it."

"Who was he?"

"That is what troubles me; I don't know."

"Do you think he was a spy, and that we are likely to get into trouble?"

"Not half as likely as he is, if he comes poking his nose around here again, be sure of that! I guess I gave him a scare that will last."

"I only hope it was a friend seeking me," sighed the young woman in the bed.

"You do not know who your real friends are, or you would be content to remain where you are," the man returned. "Your real friend is the man you saw here an hour ago."

"He is a vile wretch! I despise him!"

"You have heard what he had to say; he offers you marriage; otherwise you will have to creep to him like a dog and beg his favor. The choice is open to you, and your answer must be given at ten o'clock to-night."

"Never! never! I will die first!"

She covered her face with her hands and buried both in the pillow.

The man turned to leave the room.

"Keep your eye on her," he said to the old woman. "I will make another good search below, and then I'll lock the doors tight, so if he is in there somewhere he will have to stay."

With that he left the room, closing the door after him.

"You had better take it easy," said the old woman to the young one, then. "It is no use for you to take on so, for you have got to do as they say, and the sooner it is agreed to the better. You can't help yourself, and I am not going to help you."

"You would take pity on me if you were human."

"I am altogether too human, that's what's the matter, my dear."

The young woman again buried her face, and the old hag went pottering about the room.

The apprentice came to realize that he was in a pretty tight box.

He had made some excellent and important discoveries, but he was a prisoner and his discoveries were not likely to amount to anything.

Here in this room was the old hag, who would give the alarm if he ventured forth, and below was the man, who had declared his intention of securing the doors so that escape would be impossible.

But Bob did not give up by any means. He set his mind at work to devise some plan of escape, when the time came, for he had another purpose to carry out first.

If possible, he wanted to get an opportunity to speak to this fair prisoner, to learn who she was and why she was there, although he had already learned something of that from what he had heard.

"If I can only do that and carry the news to the boss," he said to himself, "he will knight me, most likely, and put a dog's collar on me, or something like that. But I am not out of the woods yet, and I must look out that I don't get collared and have a collar of a different sort put on me."

Letting the door close tight without a sound, he crept silently down the narrow stairs.

Reaching the bottom, he listened.

He heard the man moving around in the room, searching everywhere, and he even entered the closet into which the secret door opened.

The boy pressed against the door, in order that it might not be discovered by the crack which had revealed its presence to him, and the man left the closet and went on, till finally Bob heard him leave the rooms and close and lock the door.

The boy waited, and next heard him busy with the door he had broken but at last all was quiet.

The latter door he had nailed shut, as the sound of a hammer told.

Bob now ventured forth.

He took care to make no sound, and also took care to leave the secret door tightly closed after him.

Looking around the room, he found that everything had been pulled out of its former place, even to stands and bureaus, behind which it would have been impossible for even a cat to hide.

Bob had to smile.

"A wonder he didn't take up the carpet and look for me there," he said to himself. "Well, I got the bulge on him in good shape, no mistake; and now he has got the bulge on me. But we'll see about that, I reckon!"

He stepped to the door and tried it carefully.

It was locked, of course, as he knew he should find it, and he stooped to see if the key was in the lock.

"No, it was not, and Bob felt a thrill of hope, for he still had with him the key he had taken from the door of the rear parlor on the floor below, and quickly produced it.

If it would only fit!

He tried it, taking care not to make a sound loud enough to be heard.

Eureka! It went in, and not only so, but turned the tumblers as neatly as if the key had been made for that lock—as, indeed, it had been, for it was identical with the one on the floor below.

"We'll soon see about the bulge, I guess," he chuckled to himself, as he removed the key and cautiously opened the door. "If I can only get down to the front door unseen, and get that open, we'll all be happy yet, you bet!"

He slipped out into the hall, closed and locked the door, and, removing the key, listened.

Nothing was to be heard, and the hall was not very light.

There were places, too, behind chairs and curtains, where he could find temporary concealment if need be—places which no doubt had been well searched.

With the stealth of a cat, he advanced to the stairs and began to descend, at the same time on the alert for the least sign of danger, and ready to bolt in either direction, as circumstances might require.

He reached the bottom safely.

There he noted that the parlor door was ajar, and he doubted not that the man was in there, alert for any sound that might be made.

With back to the wall, he moved cautiously along, anxious to pass the range of vision from the room without being seen, if possible, and in any event to reach the protection of a high-backed settee.

This settee stood a little out from the wall, leaving just about enough room for him to squeeze behind it.

Bob reached this point safely.

Once there, the temptation to look into the parlor was great, so he lifted his head over the back of the settee and looked.

Sure enough, there sat the man, with his face toward the door, reading, and there was nothing to hinder him from seeing Bob's feet under the settee if he happened to look.

The other end of the settee, however, was just out of his range of sight, so Bob moved along to that end with silent haste, and for the moment felt comparatively safe. He took a careful look at the front door, to see, if possible, to what extent it was secured.

At that moment a voice broke upon his ears:

"Goes without a push or pull,
Whether it am light or full;
'Lectric power don' git tired,
'Cause it am so neatly wired!"

CHAPTER XV.

PLAYING THE JOKER.

Business Bob's heart gave a bound. It was the voice of his colored chum, Glossy Pete.

And with the last word of the verse came a tug at the bell, and the man in the room dropped his paper and hastened out.

Bob feared instant discovery, but it did not happen, for, standing, the man could not see Bob's feet on the floor under the settee when he came as far as the door, and he had no thought of looking.

He stepped to the front door, and unlocked and unbolted it.

Needless to say, Bob profited by this, for he saw just how the door was secured.

The door opened; there stood the smiling ducky with another note to deliver, which the man took and opened and hurriedly read. And, as he read, a pleased look came over his face.

"Any answer, boss?" the ducky asked.

"No, no answer."

The man closed the door, and the ducky went off singing:

"Don' yo' spit upon d'e floor,
Else d'ey fire yo' out d'e door;
Don' yo' tetch d'e ring-up draw,
Else yo' ketch it on d'e jaw!"

Evidently the man forgot to put on the fastenings again, for he turned immediately back into the parlor.

Bob thought of immediate flight, but hesitated, for now he had a desire to know what was contained in the message Glossy had brought. That, however,

seemed a desire altogether too unreasonable.

He watched the man from behind the settee, having discovered a row of fret-work holes about midway down the back of it, and saw him read again the message, and that he still smiled as he read. Then he tossed the paper upon the table and turned and came out.

Bob held himself ready to spring in either direction, either toward the door or up the stairs, but he was not called upon to do either.

The man advanced to the stairs and ran lightly up them.

No sooner was he out of sight than Bob was out from behind the settee and into the parlor, where he caught up the message the man had thrown upon the table.

It took him but a moment to master its contents:

"Carper—I have reason to think that you were right, and I have made sure of the fellow. Have him in my New York rooms, where he will be safe until after the steamer sails, at four a. m. Will be there to carry out the programme at ten to-night, as arranged. "KERNER."

The apprentice read it through twice in order to fix it upon his mind, and having done so, tossed it down on the table again and glided from the room.

He glanced cautiously up the stairs, and seeing no one, stepped to the front door.

This he opened noiselessly, and made his exit.

No one had seen or heard him, and he ran lightly down the steps and away, looking out sharp for Glossy.

Knowing the direction the ducky had probably taken, he went in the same direction, and ere long espied the young scion of Ethiopia just ahead, his hands in his pockets and his head thrown back; and, as he came nearer, caught:

"When yo' think yo' had enough,
Tell de 'duc' to let 'er luff;
But don' git off 'fo' she stop,
Else yo' may hear somethin' drop!"

"Great Gowanus!" cried Bob, rushing up. "Still at it? Is that the end of the song, Glossy?"

"Goodness! How yo' skart me!" exclaimed the ducky. "Don' yo' know better 'an to holler at a feller like d'at, when he ain' 'spectin' it? No, d'at ain't d'e end of d'e song, Bobbsey."

"How near the end is it, then?"

"I dun'no'; d'e verses d'ey keep right on a comin' an' a comin', an' it seem like d'ey nebber would end."

"Then I think I will have you shut up somewhere till the fever runs its full course and you recover your right mind. You are a public nuisance, that's what you are."

"Don' yo' like my style, Bobbsey?"

"Not a bit."

"D'en yo' had better cut my company, d'at am all. Yo' is only jealous 'cause yo' can't sing, d'at am all."

"Well, drop it. Where did you get that note you just took to that house? I am more than a little bit interested in that, my olive-black maroon. I think we have got to put a finger in that pie."

"What d'at yo' call me?"

"Chestnut."

"Ha, ha! D'at am way out ob date."

"Which shows that your mind is almost as clouded as your skin. But, come, answer my question."

"Why, d'at same feller sent me again."

"Where did he find you?"

"At d'e ferry."

"But this note was from Kerner; that fellow was Wardhouse."

"Can't help it, he kem' off'n d'e boat."

and, seein' me, he called to me an' tol' me to take it to same place."

"Then he had been over to New York?"

"Sure, Mike."

"Now I begin to see! He wasn't willing to wait until nine to-night to see Kerner—so to call him, so he went over to his New York place and laid for him."

"How do you know he did?"

"I am guessing at it, that's all. But you took it to the office first?"

"Yes, shua; but d'e boss wasn't d'ar', so I trotted right along wi'd it and 'livered it to d'e man what it war' fo'."

"Well, you come along with me. You have sung yourself into this case somehow, and may as well see it to the end. We have got to find the boss, for I suspect that he is in trouble."

"Yo' don' say!"

"Yes, I do say. If he isn't at the office, you and I have got to hustle."

"All right, Bobbsey; but what fo' d'e lob' ob goodness hab' done happened to yo'? Whar' yo' git d'em freckles?"

"Oh! that is a disguise, that is all. Come, now, move yourself, for we have got no time to waste, you bet! We have got to find the boss and rescue beauty in distress."

"Who am d'at?"

"Don't know; mighty pretty girl, all the same, and a prisoner in that house where you took the notes."

"Sho!"

"Fact; but mum is the word, you know."

So they talked while they hurried along, and in due season they were at the office.

Bob let himself in with his key, and looked immediately in the place where Phillips always left a line for him when going out, and this was what he found:

"Going to see Ambler. Back in one hour."

This was timed, and by glancing at the clock Bob saw that nearer two hours had elapsed since the detective had set out, and this gave him all the more reason for suspecting that he was the man referred to by Kerner.

He had told Glossy Pete all about it, coming along, until the darky's eyes had bulged out like black and white electric buttons.

"Yo' am right, Bobbsey," the darky cried, as soon as he heard where the detective had gone.

"And the question is, how to get at him," said Bob.

"Make yo' think hard, Bobbsey."

"I am going to make use of you."

"How'm d'at?"

"You have got to go there and find out whether Ambler is in or not. If he is, tell him Wardhouse wants to see him quick, and get him out. See?"

"Yes, I see; an' ef he ask me whar' I seen him, I kin tell him at d'e ferry, which am d'e fack. But what ef he ain' d'ar', what d'en?"

"Take off your hat, as a signal to me, and I will hurry to the front and we will work the racket together."

"All right; I am yo' huckleberry, Bobbsey."

"Better say bilberry."

"Why?"

"Because that is black."

"Oh! you go kick yo'self, won't yo'?"

Bob laughed, and they left the office and set out upon their mission.

route, and in as short a time as possible were at their destination.

On the way they had laid their plans fully, and knew just the part each was to play, and on coming near the house Bob held back, while Glossy went on to the number, singing:

"Ef yo' want to go to sleep,
Don' stretch out upon d'e seat;
Lay back yo' head an' view d'e skies,
An' 'muse yo'se'f by snappin' flies!"

And he sang right on, till he had mounted the steps and rung the bell.

Bob was where he could watch, and in a moment he saw Glossy doff his hat, as if about to take leave, but yet had more to say.

Bob took the cue and ran forward.

He dashed up the steps and excitedly inquired:

"This where Mr. George Ambler lives?" And then to Glossy, in the same sentence, almost: "Hello! what are you doing here?"

"Yes, he lives here," answered the girl at the door.

"Well, show me to his room, quick," said Bob. "He left something important, and sent me to fetch it. Wait for me, Pete, I will be with you in a second—or, better still, come in with me."

Bob had already pushed his way into the hall, with all the assurance the owner of the premises might have assumed, and Glossy followed him, the girl powerless to prevent them, had she felt a desire to do so, which she evidently did not, to any extent.

Bob's assurance was such that it gave her confidence in him, and that it was all right.

"Come, where is the room?" asked Bob.

"He is waiting for me."

"But, how do I know—"

"You don't know, and that is the reason I am telling you. He will make a row if you keep us fooling here all day, be sure of that. I have got his key; all I want is to find the right door."

Bob still had the key he had put in his pocket in the Brooklyn house.

This statement was all that was needed, and the girl led the way immediately.

If Ambler himself had entrusted the youth with the key to his room, there was no good reason why she should hesitate about showing him where the room was; it stood to reason.

She led the way to the door and indicated it.

Bob whipped out the key and tried it in the lock, but it would not work; it would have been a wonder if it had.

"Great Gowanus!" he exclaimed, quite loudly, with a double purpose. "He has given me the wrong key, sure as I am born. But you have other keys in the house that will fit this door, of course."

"Yes, the mistress has a key."

"Trot it up here, then, double quick."

The girl hastened off to obey, under the spell of Bob's assurance, and Bob listened attentively at the door.

He gave a couple of raps, and then one. It was an understood signal between him and his employer.

To his delight, he heard it faintly answered, and he said to Glossy:

"He is here, my patent-leather pard, and we will have him out if it takes all the shine off of you and a hind leg off of me to get him."

"Yo' jes' bet yo' life!" agreed Glossy.

"Why don't you sing?" asked Bob.

"Lor! I's too 'cited to sing now, Bobbsey."

They now heard excited talk below, and two females came hastening up.

One was the girl who had admitted them, and the other was evidently the mistress of the house.

The latter was ahead, and she was a positive woman, to judge her by appearance, and there was fire in her eye as she confronted Bob and his midnight-hued partner.

"What do you mean?" she demanded, sharply.

"Business, madam," answered Bob.

"But you lied to this girl; you said that Mr. Ambler had given you his key, when I happen to know that he did nothing of the kind."

"How do you know he didn't?"

"Because he has gone for good, and he gave up his key to me before he started. Now, I demand to know just what you want here, and what you are up to, and if you don't look out I shall hand you over to the police."

Bob saw that she meant business, too.

"Well, I'll come right down to the meat of the matter, madam," he said, "as things are as they are. My employer is a prisoner in this room, and I am going to have him out of there if I have to take a wheel off to get him. See? The best thing you can do is to unlock the door."

"Laws a mercy!" the woman exclaimed. "Are you crazy, boy? Sally, I think you had better call in a policeman."

"Yes, I think you had, too, Sally," Bob encouraged. "We can then get down to business in earnest. You will find that I don't scare that way, madam."

"Are you really in earnest, that there is a man in this room?"

"Of course I am in earnest. Do you suppose I would be wasting time and nerve force in this lavish manner if I wasn't? You open the door, and I'll prove it to you before you can say scat!"

"Well, I will open the door, and if there is no one here—which I am sure there can't be—I shall hand you over to the police."

"That's a bargain; open up."

"It must be the gentleman who called," said the girl, timidly.

"What gentleman?" asked the landlady.

"One who called to see Mr. Ambler. I did not see him go away, and I wondered when he went."

"You are too easy for the place you hold, Sally, too easy altogether," the mistress declared, as she searched for the right key. "I think I must make a change. Now we'll see!"

She had found the key, and she thrust it into the lock and threw open the door.

Bob bounded in instantly.

He looked around, as did the others, but no one was to be seen there.

A closet was in the room, and Bob threw that open, but no one was there, and it began to look as if the landlady was right.

But Bob knew what he was about, and he had heard the signal. He knew that Joe Phillips was somewhere there, and he began investigation in earnest, resolved to have him out.

He looked under the bed. Not there. In the wardrobe. Not there. And it seemed as if there was no other place to look for him. Ha! the lounge.

There was a low sofa by the wall, with a covering of chintz that touched the floor all around.

It did not look as if a man could lie under it, but Bob looked.

And he was rewarded.

There lay Joe Phillips, bound and gagged, so that it was almost impossible for him to move a finger.

"What did I tell you?" cried Bob. "You talk about police, madam; I think you will hear of all the police you want to, in the near by and by."

"But I had nothing to do with it—"

"That remains to be seen. Here, Glossy, don't stand there with your eyes

CHAPTER XVI.

ROBERT TO THE RESCUE.

The apprentice knew Ambler's address. Ambler had given it to Phillips, as will be remembered.

The two youths took the most direct

sticking out like pot legs; lend me a hand!"

Pete sprang to obey, and the sofa was lifted up and set aside, when Bob and his colored partner quickly cut the cords that held the Brooklyn detective so close a prisoner.

It was some moments before Joe could move or speak, for he had been bound cruelly tight, and the gag had almost dislocated his jaws.

Bob rubbed him, Pete assisting, and presently he could get up.

"How did you find me?" he asked.

"By looking for you, of course," answered Bob. "No time now to parley, for we have got to git up and hustle, I tell you."

"You say you are innocent of any part in this business, madam?" to the landlady.

"Yes, yes, sir; I candidly assure you that I knew nothing about it."

"Well, I am inclined to believe you, but all the same I shall have the police give some attention to your house for a little while, and any attempt on your part to warn Ambler will get you into serious trouble."

"He has gone for good, sir," the woman hastened to declare. "He gave up his key before he started, and I have no idea where he can be."

"I guess that is straight," said Bob. "Come on, boss, for I have got the butt end of the business in hand now, you bet!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SETTING THE SNARES.

Joe Phillips made certain of the woman first, however, by giving her a good scare.

More than that, he telephoned to headquarters and had a man set to watch the house for a time, and that done, set out upon his return to Brooklyn.

On the way Bob related his own adventure, and all that he had learned, and needless to say his employer was highly pleased. He was more than pleased with the prompt way in which Bob had rescued him.

"But how came you in such a fix?" asked Bob.

"Why, the rascal mesmerized me, something I had never experienced before, and for which I was not looking."

"Great Gowanus! Then mebbly he mesmerized Miss Achterson, too, and mebbly she wasn't dead at all, and mebbly she is the gal I saw in that house. Great Gowanus! but it is a whoppin' case!"

"Not a doubt in my mind but that is correct, Bob," agreed the detective. "I am now almost positive that it was he, too, who mesmerized Wellstone, but in a different fashion, and this night we will prove the case against him and give him a shock that will try his nerves."

"You bet we will!" cried Bob.

"Now, the first thing is to find what steamship he has engaged passage on, so that he cannot give us the slip if anything miscarries."

"That's so, and it will be easy to find out, for her time of sailing is down for four o'clock in the morning. All you have got to do is to look in the papers, and that will settle it."

"Right you are, Bob."

"And what then, boss?"

"Prepare our programme."

"And keep out of sight."

"Yes; I must not be seen now. I will adopt a suitable disguise as soon as we reach the office."

"An' whar' does I come in?" inquired Glossy. "Yo' hab' 'cited my curiosity to a wondrous degree now, an' I must see d'e f'ing out or bu'st. Ain't yo' got a second fiddle som'rs d'at I kin play?"

"We'll have to find one, and count you in somehow," said Joe.

So they chatted until they had crossed the ferry, where Glossy decided to stop for the present, and as Joe and Bob went on they left him singing:

"Do not watch d'e 'ductor close,
To see ef he or d'e co. git mos';
He will f'ink yo's on d'e spot,
And go fo' yo' in manner hot!"

Arriving at the office, Bob and his employer sat down for a further talk, when the detective required him to go over again all that he had already told, and he listened with close attention.

"It is one of the strangest oases I ever had anything to do with, or ever heard of, Bob," the detective declared. "We have not got at the secret of it, even yet, but we are in a fair way to do so now. We will force a confession out of that fellow."

"Or scare it out of him, one or the other."

"You are right."

"And what now, boss?"

"My disguise, first, and while I am fixing up that, you go and bring that darky pard of yours here."

"Ha! you want Glossy?"

"Yes; and I had no business to let him stay behind at the ferry. I have a little work for him and you to do. I will tell you what it is when you get back. Off with you."

"All right, boss. Whatever you say goes."

Bob grabbed his hat and threw open the door, but at that moment music fell upon his ears:

"Ef yo' got a gal in town,
Tell her dress in her bes' gown;
Take her out in weather fine,
For a scoot along d'e line!"

"Here he comes, boss!" cried Bob.

"Yes, I hear him," responded the detective.

"Buy a pound of tooty-froo',
Ride by daylight an' by dark,
Ha'f a bushel peanuts, too;
Court yo' gal by 'lectric spark!"

"Cork up, Glossy!" cried Bob. "That is plenty. We don't want folks here to think we are running a lunatic asylum."

"Yo' boss had better git rid ob yo', den, is all I hab' to say," the darky fired back at him. "Might jes' as well hang out a sign ef he don't, d'at am dead straight."

"Better leave him alone, Bob," said Phillips, laughing. "Come in, Pete, for I want to see you. Was just sending Bob to bring you here. Do you bring me any news, seeing that you are here rather sooner than I was looking for you?"

"Yes, d'at's what I do, boss. D'at feller Kerner, or Ambler, hab' jes' come ober from New York, and, gettin' my eye on him, I follered him to de house ob d'at other feller Wardhouse, where I done lef' him, an' kem' straight here to let yo' know it, so you could scoop him."

"You have done right, but I am not ready to scoop him just yet. I want him to think he has got it all his own way till ten o'clock to-night."

"Oh! all right, if d'at am de case, I'll mosey right erlong—"

"No; I want you."

"Sure 'nuff, so yo' did say."

"I want you to shadow that house and see that those men do not leave town. I will give you a note to the police generally, and if you suspect that they are on the wing, have them arrested."

"Yo' bet!"

"But don't do it unless as a last resort; be sure of it before you make the move."

"I see, boss."

"I am going to arm Bob in the same manner, and he will watch the other house to see that the young woman is not taken away, for what has happened there may

give them alarm and cause them to take flight, though I hardly look for that, now that they think they have fixed me out."

"That is just the thing!" cried Bob. "You are the one to lay plans, boss, and if we don't make a grand scoop it will be funny."

"I think we shall."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am going first to the hotel, to see what farther can be learned about the missing body there," with a drooping of his left eyelid as he said it, "and then I shall pay a visit to Mrs. Achterson. After that I will go to the house where the girl is, and make dead sure of that fellow Carper. I will make a tool of him, and thus lay my trap."

"Bully!" cried Bob, dancing around. "Let's do a waltz, Glossy, while the boss writes out our commissions!"

And he caught hold of his darky pard and whirled him around.

The detective was only a few moments writing the notes, and when he had done so he gave each definite instructions and dismissed them.

They set out immediately, and when Bob parted from Glossy he left the jolly black boy gayly singing as he set off in another direction, his voice rising above the hum of the street:

"De trolley car am mighty slick,
Scums erlong so lightnin' quick;
Ef you don't get out d'e way,
Et wull put yo' whar' yo'll stay!"

Joe Phillips set out for the hotel.

He was in disguise, as stated, and had to introduce himself to his friend, the clerk.

With him he had quite a conversation, paid a visit to the room up-stairs in which the awful crime had been committed, and finally took his leave, with a well-defined idea in his mind.

From there he went to the home of Mrs. Achterson.

He was not known, of course, and had some difficulty in getting an audience with the lady under an assumed name.

That was accomplished, however, and as soon as he was alone in her presence he made himself known, and explained his reason for coming in that way—that he desired to remain unknown.

"But, what news do you bring me?" was asked. "That is most important to me, Mr. Phillips."

"I think I bring you the best of news, madam."

"Then you have found the body of my poor Luella?"

"Well, yes, I can safely assure you of that, I think. I will bring her to you not later than midnight to-night, unless I am very much mistaken."

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSING THE CIRCLE.

The detective was afraid to tell her the truth at once.

He prepared her for it, however, and finally took his leave, after cautioning her against revealing who had called.

From there he went straight to the house where the unknown young woman was being held a prisoner, and when the door was opened to his ring he asked for Mr. Carper.

"I am he, sir," said the man who had opened the door.

"Then you are the man I want to see, sir," said Phillips. "I am here from Mr. Ambler."

"Mr. Ambler?"

"Otherwise Mr. Kerner."

"Where did you see him, then, sir?"

"At his room, No. —, — Street, New York. He has come over to Brooklyn, and is now at No. —, — street."

"That is enough, sir. Come right in. I can see that you are all right, and that the

gentleman you name has sent you to me. Now," as they entered the parlor, "I will hear you."

Joe Phillips drew a pistol and leveled it at the man's forehead.

"Sit down," he commanded, "and you shall hear me, indeed! The little game is up, my man, but I am going to give you a chance."

The fellow was as pale as death; he trembled violently, and he dropped rather than sat.

"I cave," he gasped. "Who are you?"

"I am Joe Phillips."

"That's enough! For God's sake, give me a chance!"

"I will do it, if you swear that you will work against the others and in my favor."

"I'll do it; I swear I will!"

"Step here to the window."

The man obeyed.

"Do you see those two policemen over there? Well, they have been detailed to watch this house, and there are more of them around. There is no escape, and if you try to double on me you will be scooped."

"I won't try it; all I ask is a show."

"Well, you shall have it. The fact that I am here ought to be proof enough that there is no help for you."

"I know it; there is only one man in Brooklyn that I stood afraid of, and that is you. Tell me what you want of me, and I swear I will fill the bill right up to the scratch."

"Ambler is to come here at ten o'clock to-night."

"Yes, that is the plan."

"And he is going to try to force a marriage with a young woman who is now a prisoner in this house."

"Thunder! Is there anything that you don't know?"

"Not much, in regard to this case, I guess."

"How did you find it out?"

"By the boy who paid you a visit, the same fellow who read the message you received from Ambler, and who came at once to my rescue."

"Curse him! Where was he? How did he hide from me? He would never have carried any report to anybody if I had got another sight of him! I can tell you that! How did he escape?"

"Do not trouble yourself about those details now, but attend to what I have to say."

"Well, you have got me in a fix."

"And will keep you there, too. Do not imagine there is any outlet for you, for there is not. The whole matter is known, as you ought to be satisfied now, and there is only one chance for you."

"And that is?"

"To play into my hands, as I have said."

"And I have said that I will do it."

"That is enough, then. I will give you the particulars. Are you armed?"

"Yes."

"Surrender your pistol to me."

The fellow obeyed, seeing that it was useless to resist.

Phillips then unfolded his plan, and told the fellow of the part he had to play.

"I take the offer gladly," the rascal accepted.

"All right; I will trust you, because I am going to be on hand to watch you, and you cannot fail me. By aiding me and trapping the chief rascal, you will be let down easy; by trying to throw me over you nominate yourself for State's Prison for life."

"Say no more; I am not a candidate for that, thank you. I know when my cart is upset as well as anybody."

"Then lead me to the room where that young woman is. No, second thought, you need not do that."

"I'll do it, if you say so."

"No, I will not let her know, for that will make the surprise all the greater for my friend, Ambler."

"I will tell you all you want to know, then, which will be just as well, and I will give it to you straight, too. I have nothing to gain by dealing crooked with Joe Phillips!"

"But everything to lose. One question will suffice: Is that young woman the missing Luella Achterson?"

"Yes."

The day was about spent.

Just about dusk Ambler paid a call to the house to see that everything was all right.

Phillips heard the interview from his place of hiding, and was satisfied that the man Carper was not going to try to deal double with him, but was in earnest in his promise.

Carper went away, and in the course of another hour other persons came to the door and were admitted.

One of these was Bob Buckle; another was a man who wore his hat pulled down so that his face could not be seen, and who had the collar of his coat turned up for further concealment.

Finally another appeared, who came singing:

"De motorman, he hab' d'e fun,
D'e 'ductor he scoop all d'e mun';
D'e passenger, he hab' d'e best,
'Cause he jes' set still an' rest!"

Needless to say who the singer was. He was admitted and shown up to the rooms on the next floor with the others.

Finally, later on, came the villains in the play, who proceeded at once up-stairs, Carper accompanying them, having first secured the front door to the satisfaction of Ambler.

They entered the room where the old hag guarded her fair prisoner, and where the grand denouement was to take place.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONCLUSION.

In the space of the secret staircase stood Bob Buckle and the man who had come into the house with his collar turned up and hat pulled down, as stated.

The detective and all the others were in the hall without, where they awaited the right time to enter. Carper, within, was to open the door to them at the proper moment.

Ambler had come there with the intention of forcing a marriage with Luella, and had a villain with him, in the guise of a preacher, to perform the ceremony. He urged gently at first, but soon began to threaten, until, finally, the young woman cried out in despair:

"I could not do your bidding if I would, George Ambler, for I am married already. I am the wife of Robert Wellstone!"

"You were his wife, I know. He killed himself last night, at his room in the hotel. Here is your marriage certificate, which I intend to burn, and then where will your good name be?"

"Mercy! mercy! Spare me! spare me!"

"That is what I want to do! Marry me, and all will be well!"

"Murderer!"

It was another voice, strangely hollow, and all looked in the direction whence it came.

There, against a dark background like an open door in the solid wall, stood Robert Wellstone, pale like death, a purple mark around his throat, and with index pointed straight at Ambler.

The conspirator started, and appeared as if about to fall to the floor from sheer fright.

"Murderer!" the apparition repeated.

"Are you not satisfied with your work al-

ready done? Would you carry your misdeeds further? Heaven forbid!"

With a shriek the young woman in the bed fainted dead away; the old hag appeared as if ready to drop dead, so great was her terror, and the rest were no less disturbed by what they saw and heard.

A moment of this; then the door was thrown open, and Joe Phillips and policemen and the others stalked into the room.

Wellstone, alive and well, sprang to the aid of his wife, while the others took care of their prisoners.

It had been a surprise complete, and Ambler had no room to get out of the fix he was in.

They were all taken care of; the young woman was borne home to her mother as soon as possible, and great was Mrs. Achterson's joy. The prisoners, save Carper, were shown no mercy.

The case was this: Andrew Achterson, husband of Mrs. Achterson and father of Luella, had died very rich, and had left everything to Luella. Ambler was in the employ of the firm of lawyers who had the matter in hand, or were supposed to have, but he had kept all knowledge of it from them. It was his determination to marry the heiress first, to make sure of his own good fortune.

But his suit was rejected, and he came into the secret that the young woman was already the wife of Wellstone. This enraged him, and he resolved that he would stop at nothing to gain his ends. He gave the young woman a sleeping potion, in a way she could not suspect—a drug that would make her appear as if dead. Then, with the aid of Wardhouse and Carper, he stole the body, having made a key that would admit him into the house. More than that, he murdered Wellstone, as he supposed, and stole the marriage certificate.

His intention was to marry the young woman, sail immediately, and as no other marriage was known, it could be made to appear that it had been an elopement, and all would be well. He believed that he could force the young woman into playing that role, when she came to realize the desperate situation she was in.

But it did not work that way, as we have seen. They had not figured on Joe Phillips, of Brooklyn, and his able apprentice, Bob Buckle.

Wellstone's body had not been stolen, of course, but it had been removed to another room, the detective having discovered that the man was not dead. Prompt medical aid had brought him out all right.

His testimony against Ambler was enough. He told how Ambler had called upon him, and how, during their conversation, Ambler had mesmerized him, and sought to kill him by a silken cord when he had rendered him helpless.

Little more can be said. The reader who has followed our romance to the end can understand all the finer plays that have been made here and there along the way, in the light of the revelation that has now been made, and can appreciate them.

No small share of the credit for the outcome of the matter fell upon Bob Buckle, who took it all as matter of fact, and did not allow his elation to be manifest.

And Glossy Pete, too, came in for a share of the praise that was being freely bestowed, but he could not stand it, and went off singing:

"I'd like a ride d'at's good an' long,
'Bout as long as dis heah song;
I'd git up in d'e early morn,
An' ride till Gabriel blow his horn!"

THE END.

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